



JANUARY 2014 VOLUME 24 ISSUE 1

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound



COMPUTER LOVE: FROM 'BEING JOHN MALKOVICH' TO 'HER'

## SPIKE JONZE

PLUS

### THE BEST FILMS OF 2013

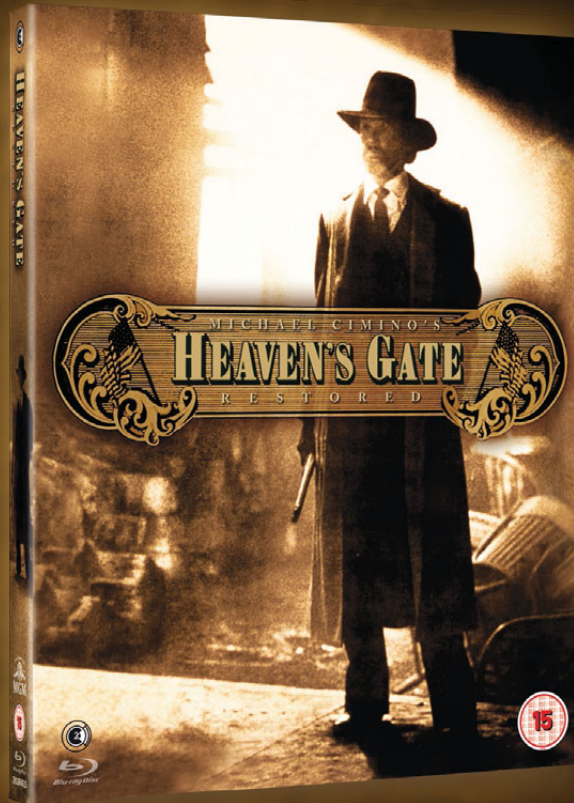
- ALEXANDER PAYNE ON 'NEBRASKA' ● ROBERT REDFORD IN 'ALL IS LOST'
- BONG JOON-HO'S 'SNOWPIERCER' ● BRUCE DERN ● 1970S BRITISH TV GOTHIC

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## Blockage on the line

Despite Bong Joonho's latest film *Snowpiercer* proving a hit in France and Korea, English-speaking audiences won't be able to see it for some time to come. By **Tony Rayns**

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##### Computer love

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The sheer number of films screening in 2013 might have made it harder than usual to predict a winner in our annual poll, but it has also meant the quality of those in the running has never been higher. **Nick James** introduces our annual survey, and we print a selection of responses from the more than 100 critics polled

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Bruce Dern, star of *Nebraska*, casts his mind back over 50-plus years in the fray. By **Nick Pinkerton**





# The Masters of Cinema Series

## NOVEMBER NEW RELEASES

# NOSFERATU

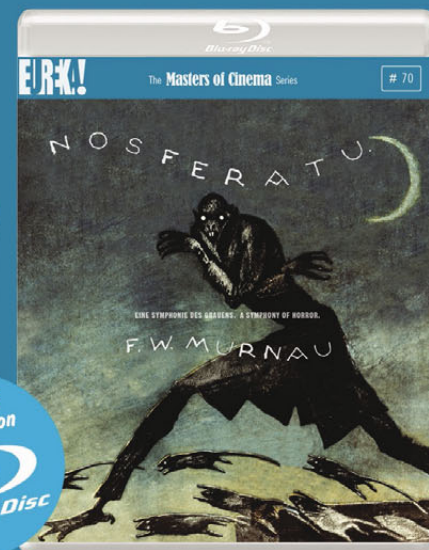
An iconic film of the German expressionist cinema, and one of the most famous of all silent movies, F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu. A Symphony of Horror* continues to haunt — and, indeed, terrify — modern audiences with the unshakable power of its images. By teasing a host of occult atmospherics out of dilapidated set-pieces and innocuous real-world locations alike, Murnau captured on celluloid the deeply-rooted elements of a waking nightmare, and launched the signature "Murnau-style" that would change cinema history forever.

### SPECIAL FEATURES

- Brand new high-definition restoration by Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung in 1080p on the Blu-ray • Stereo and 5.1 scores • Two audio commentaries: one newly recorded by film historian David Kalat; the second by historian R. Dixon Smith and critic Brad Stevens • *The Language of Shadows*, a 53-minute documentary on Murnau's early years and the filming of *Nosferatu* • New video interview with *BFI Film Classics: Nosferatu* author Kevin Jackson • Exclusive video piece taped by and featuring filmmaker Abel Ferrara • Newly translated optional English subtitles with original German intertitles • 56-PAGE BOOKLET featuring writing by Gilberto Perez, Albin Grau, Enno Patalas, and Craig Keller; notes on the restoration; and rare archival imagery.

On Blu-ray and DVD from 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013

Limited Edition Dual Format **SELE300K** also available



"One of the most poetic of all horror films" - *Time Out*

"A visual and emotional treat" - *Empire*

# MARTIN SCORSESE PRESENTS

# WORLD CINEMA PROJECT

## VOLUME ONE

"The World Cinema Project is a natural expansion of my love for movies. [In 1990], together with my fellow filmmakers, we created the Film Foundation to help preserve American cinema. Much has been accomplished and much work remains to be done, but the Film Foundation has created a base upon which we can build. There is now, I believe, a film preservation consciousness. The World Cinema Project [was] created to help developing countries preserve their cinematic treasures. We want to help strengthen and support the work of international archives, and provide a resource for those countries lacking the archival and technical facilities to do the work themselves."

— Martin Scorsese, WCP Founder and Chairman

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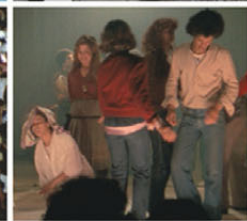


On Dual Format from 25<sup>th</sup> November 2013

### DRY SUMMER [ SUSUZ YAZ ]

by Metin Erksan

Turkey / 1964



### TRANCES [ TRANSES ]

by Ahmed El Maanouni

Morocco / 1981



### REVENGE [ MEST' ]

by Ermek Shinarbaev

Kazakhstan / 1989



Released 3<sup>rd</sup> December: *Il Bidone* (Fellini)

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(incorporating Monthly Film Bulletin)  
Published monthly by the BFI

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Volume 24 Issue 1 (NS)

ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

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**David Thomson's** most recent book is *Moments that Made the Movies*

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Spike Jonze, photographed by Nadav Kander

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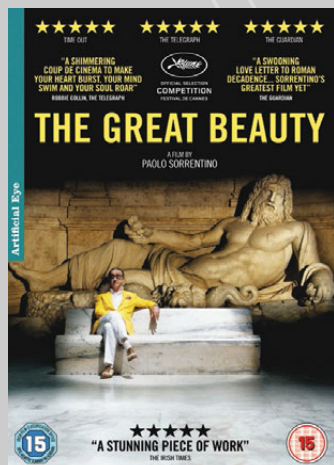


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**And online this month** A new-look [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk) | all our 2013 in review votes and comments, plus the best DVDs and web video and the year in cinematic nonfiction [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)



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## Paolo Sorrentino The Great Beauty

At once a sumptuously shot love letter to Roman decadence and a biting satire on Berlusconi's Italy, this dazzling, dizzying and entrancing cinematic tour-de-force, built around a stunning performance by Toni Servillo (Il Divo, Gomorrah), has drawn comparisons with La Dolce Vita.

AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU-RAY  
& ON DEMAND 13 JANUARY



## Clio Barnard The Selfish Giant

This bold, gripping second feature from the visionary director of The Arbor boasts breathtaking cinematography, unforgettable performances from its two non-professional leads and immense critical acclaim, hailing it as one of the year's most important British releases.

AVAILABLE ON DVD, BLU-RAY  
& ON DEMAND 27 JANUARY



## Abdellatif Kechiche Blue is the Warmest Colour

Mesmerisingly beautiful as an artistic accomplishment, jaw-droppingly frank in its explicit sexual content and utterly compelling from start to finish, the controversial yet masterful winner of this year's Palme d'Or has become one of the most talked about films of the year.

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★★★★ Brooding, provocative and utterly hypnotic...

courageous, compelling cinema *Empire*



# FLOATING SKYSCRAPERS

A film by  
Tomasz Wasilewski

★★★★  
Masterfully orchestrated,  
elegantly framed and  
intensely provocative

*CineVue*

A timely gay love story ...  
beautiful, heartfelt

*Attitude*

Ground-breaking

*Dazed and Confused*

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### Bookshop distribution

Central Books

Tel: 020 8986 4854

Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by Mail Right Int., 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway, NJ 08854. Periodicals Postage Paid at Piscataway, NJ and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight & Sound c/o Mail Right International Inc. 1637 Stelton Road B4, Piscataway NJ 08854.

### Subscription office:

For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact: Subscription Department Sight & Sound Abacus e-Media 3rd Floor Chancery Exchange 10 Furnival Street, London, EC4A 1AB Tel: 020 8955 7070 Fax: 020 8421 8244 Email: sightandsound@alliance-media.co.uk

Annual subscription rates: UK £45, Eire and ROW £68 £10 discount for BFI members



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The BFI is a charity, (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



# Editorial Nick James



## I LOST IT AT THE FEELIES

Regular readers will know that I almost never write actual film reviews, the reason being that what the editor says in that context may feel like a judgement from the whole publication rather than an individual.

This month is an exception. I've reviewed the film of our cover story, Spike Jonze's *Her* (see page 66), and was happy to do so because it captures so powerfully a feeling unique to the way we live now: the strange distanced intimacy you experience when communicating by SMS or the various internet messaging formats. Of course, this phenomenon probably only feels strange to those, like myself, who grew up before the internet age, just as a reversed feeling of dislocation must have been felt by people used only to writing letters and telegrams – similarly distanced, if more delayed, forms of intercourse – when the telephone came into wider use, bringing a great illusion of intimacy along with the need to 'perform', often in public (a phenomenon brilliantly lampooned in Vincente Minnelli's *Meet Me in St. Louis*).

But *Her*'s depiction of a future human's love affair with an operating system raises a spectre that's already tired of haunting prognosticators – what cinema may become. In *Her* Theodore Twombly (played by Joaquin Phoenix) effectively falls in love with what, in physical terms, amounts to an earpiece and a tiny camera stuck on his chest. The disembodied character Samantha, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, whispers in his ear (to paraphrase The Beatles) the words he longs to hear. Though in one sense they couldn't be more different, Samantha the operating system had me thinking back to what the character John the Savage experiences in Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel *Brave New World*:

"Take hold of those metal knobs on the arms of your chair," whispered Lenina. "Otherwise you won't get any of the feely effects."

...There were ten seconds of complete darkness; then suddenly, dazzling and incomparably more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood, far more real than reality, there stood the stereoscopic images, locked in one another's arms, of a gigantic negro and a golden-haired young brachycephalic Beta-Plus female.

The Savage started. That sensation on his lips! He lifted a hand to his mouth; the titillation ceased; let his hand fall back on the metal knob; it began again. The scent organ, meanwhile, breathed pure

*Though 3D has not conquered all in the way some predicted, the success of 'Gravity' demonstrates it is now a viable offering in a multi-platform environment. But what's next after 3D?*



musk. Expiringly, a sound-track super-dove cooed 'Oo-oooh'... The stereoscopic lips came together again, and once more the facial erogenous zones of the six thousand spectators in the Alhambra tingled with almost intolerable galvanic pleasure. 'Ooh ...'"

The feelies are closer to the kind of movie theatre stunts laid on by the filmmaker William Castle in the 1950s and 60s (and celebrated in Joe Dante's *Matinee*) – flying skeletons, vibrating seats, etc – than to the kind of melding of human and artificial intelligence suggested in *Her* and explored in books such as Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity Is Near*. Except, that is, for that phrase about being 'more real than reality'. The recent push for 3D has made us familiar with being surrounded by the image and the 'ghosts' of actors, and though 3D has not yet conquered all in the way that, say, DreamWorks Animation CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg predicted, the success of *Gravity* demonstrates it is now an established viable offering in a multi-platform environment.

But what's the next stage after 3D? We're all used, in the heightened moments of our lives, to that feeling where we say, "It's like we're in our own movie." What if we're wearing an earpiece, several cameras on our bodies and something like Google Glass wrapped round our vision field? I don't mean the passive sit-still virtual reality that excited much comment a few years ago, but a system designed to 'enhance' your real experiences so that you feel like you're in a movie all the time.

Video games are heading in that direction, and what's interesting about that is the performative aspect. Having found that some of us prefer, through shyness, to message rather than talk on the phone, and that others like to constantly advertise their personal lives through shouting at devices in public, what kind of divide will a truly performative interactive form of future cinema entertainment create among us?

*Her* is careful to show that Theodore's experience with Samantha keeps him in a kind of personal bubble, and much satirical fun is had when the use of these personal OSs spreads so that everyone is rushing by each other as they rabbit to their true loves. It's enough to make you want to sit in a darkened room. **S**



IN THE FRAME

## SERIOUSLY FUNNY



Mask of sorrow: Keaton was always a whisker away from danger and a mile away from breaking a sweat

Effortless, indifferent, seemingly unaware that he was being funny, Buster Keaton was a clown the 21st century can take seriously

**By Pamela Hutchinson**

As a description, 'deadpan' will only take you so far. Buster Keaton may not crack a smile on film, but his face registers other emotions: alarm, fear and melancholy. Meanwhile, his body twists like a leaf in the wind. The apparent immobility of Keaton's high-boned face is merely relative. Incarnating his motto of "Think slow, act fast", his limbs move with an elastic, rapid ease that outpaces those graven features.

Keaton's gift was to combine the face of a poet with the body of an acrobat. He learned to dissociate said body from said face when he was still a youngster, being flung around a vaudeville stage by his father, Joe. "I had learned at an early age that I happened to be the type of comedian that couldn't laugh at anything he was doing. I also learned that the more serious I took everything, how serious life was in general, the better laughs I got."

Charlie Chaplin may have been the king of sentiment, but Keaton's knack of playing knockabout gags with that forlorn demeanour and fragile physique won him the audience's unquestioning sympathy. "The one thing that I made sure was that I didn't ask for it," he later said. "If the audience wanted to feel sorry for me, that was up to them." Filmgoers are still being taken in by the frozen-face trick. When, inevitably, we chortle at Keaton's gags, it's with a sneaking suspicion that a laugh was the last thing he expected. It's as if, burdened by other worries, he hasn't even noticed his actions are funny, and that our burst of laughter is a necessary release in a hostile world, a noisy way of expressing our support.

And as 21st-century Busterphiles appreciate, this offhand approach achieved something almost unthinkable: Keaton, wearing a porkpie hat and a starched collar, made slapstick cool. With complete nonchalance, facilitated by precise timing and meticulously plotted movements, he made the most foolhardy stunts look effortless. Balanced on the

### Women Film Pioneers Project

Proving that women were more than just actresses in the silent era, Columbia University's online history project ([wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu](http://wfpp.cdrs.columbia.edu)) offers a fascinating database of essays, biographies and videos; a work-in-progress (at the moment it focuses solely on the Americas) that profiles 180 female critics, directors, designers, editors, camera operators and more.



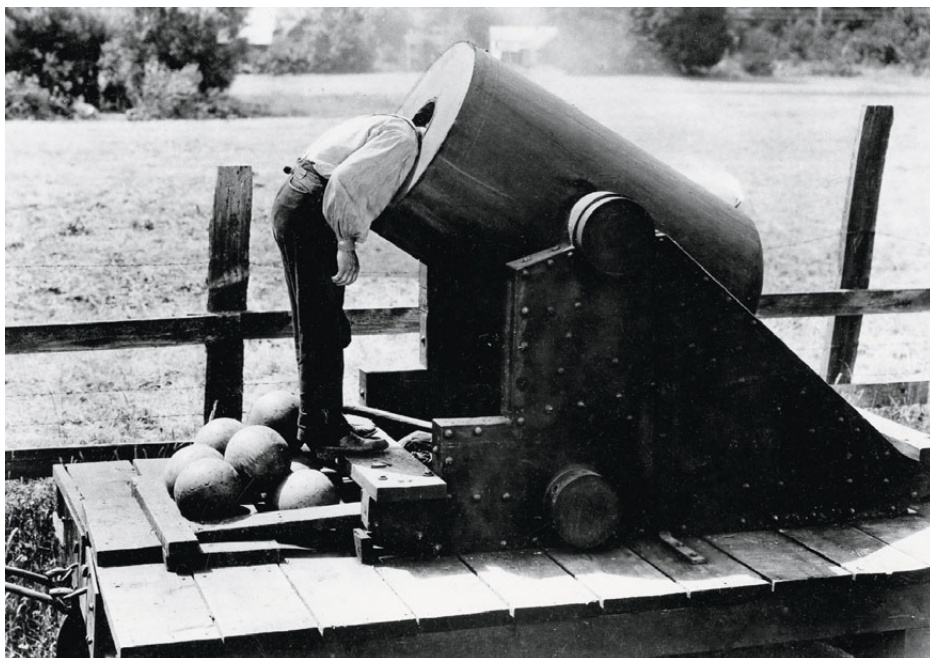
### 'Kino/Film: Soviet Posters of the Silent Screen'

Just as pioneering as 1920s Soviet cinema were the constructivist posters – created by artists such as Aleksandr Rodchenko and the Sternberg brothers – which advertised Vertov, Eisenstein and co's experiments. An exhibition at London's Grad gallery (17 January – 29 March) presents a selection of designs from this period, many of which have never been seen before in the UK.



ON OUR  
RADAR






Cannon fodder: Keaton in 1926's *The General*


handlebars of a riderless motorcycle, or leaning from the front of a steam engine to sweep fallen sleepers from the track, our man was always a whisker away from a collision and a mile away from breaking a sweat.

The grace with which Keaton survives every scrape is uncanny, not least because one is never quite sure how objects will behave in these sharply surprising films. Despite its drunken angles and grotesque proportions the newlyweds' house in *One Week* (1920) stands up; it even rotates. Adrift at sea in a bathtub life-raft in *The Boat* (1921), Keaton pours his son a refreshing glass of water from the tap. In *The Blacksmith* (1922), a broken watch is repaired as if it were a crooked nail, with a lump hammer and a plunge into the furnace.

And even when the world around him behaves exactly as it should, Keaton rises so far above reality that gravity can't bring him down. In *The Goat* (1921), as the legs of a clay horse buckle beneath his weight, Keaton maintains a dignified pose, as if both he and his mount were carved from solid marble. It's clear why Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel both adored Keaton's work. The sequence in *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) that begins when a dreaming Keaton steps through the movie screen secured his surrealist status.

The only thing, in truth, that could ruffle Keaton's cool was domesticity. Not for nothing does the horde of would-be brides pursuing him in *Seven Chances* (1925) precipitate a landslide. Romantic involvements repeatedly push Keaton into the path of danger. In *The General* (1926), when Johnnie stuffs Annabelle into a sack and flings her into a boxcar? That's pure revenge. Not to mention the in-laws from hell that prowl *Our Hospitality* (1923), *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* (1928) and *My Wife's Relations* (1922). We can blame this horror of the hearth on Keaton's unhappy marriage to Natalie Talmadge, and his bruising childhood. In the same breath, we must admit that Keaton bewitches modern audiences by wrongfooting our expectations of Hollywood happy-ever-after.

Following his silent era success, it's well known that Keaton suffered a disappointing, alcohol-sodden 1930s. But since then, his stock has soared: he is fêted by comics, intellectuals and artists, and embraced by audiences. It's hard not to believe that Keaton's movies were made for our time, not his, all along. 

 **A retrospective, 'A Serious Man, A Modern World: Buster Keaton and the Cinema of Today', is screening at BFI Southbank, London throughout January and February**

## ANATOMY OF A MOVIE THE BUTLER

22% *The Color Purple* (1984)

18% *Forrest Gump* (1994)

12% *The Remains of the Day* (1993)

10% *The Learning Tree* (1969)

10% *Zelig* (1983)

10% *Panther* (1995)

8% *In the Heat of the Night* (1967)

5% *Still a Brother* (1968)

4% *He Got Game* (1998)

1% *Nixon* (1995)



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH BILLY WILDER

"The director must be a policeman, a midwife, a psychoanalyst, a sycophant, and a bastard."



## Walerian Borowczyk restoration

"The world needs to be reminded," says Terry Gilliam of the surrealist cinema of Poland's Walerian Borowczyk. With Arrow films, Gilliam is fronting a Kickstarter campaign to restore Borowczyk's 1968 debut feature 'Goto, l'ilie d'amour' (right). Arrow hopes to release this lost classic, along with many of Borowczyk's little-seen shorts and early features, on Blu-ray and DVD in spring 2014.



## 'Assembly: A survey of Recent Artists' Film and Video in Britain 2008-2013'

Thirty-six experts nominated films for this wide-ranging programme of more than 80 artist filmmakers, among them Jennet Thomas, Mark Leckey, Clio Barnard, Tacita Dean, John Akomfrah and John Smith. The films will be organised into thematic screenings, which will be showing at Tate Britain, London, until 15 March.





# HOOP DREAMS

In cinema, sex and nudity go hand in hand: Jane Campion's *The Piano* reminds us that you don't have to take your clothes off to have fun



**By Hannah McGill**

The appealing idea that the Victorians were prudish enough to cover piano legs with pantalets has been exposed as myth

– Matthew Sweet uses it in his book *Inventing the Victorians* as evidence of our habit of ascribing a largely fantasised puritanism to the people of that era. But it still feels nicely pertinent to *The Piano* (1992), a film in which a musical instrument does indeed become a dangerously sexualised object, and the trappings of gender and social standing find frequent expression through clothing and its removal.

Particularly evocative is the hooped underskirt worn by Ada McGrath (Holly Hunter): a structure at once restrictive and defensive, as if built both to entrap and to protect Ada's lower half. The cage-skirt is fixed in our minds as a metaphor – and the notion of Ada hiding within her clothes is established – in the film's opening sequence, in which Ada and her daughter Flora (Anna Paquin) are deposited on the storm-tossed New Zealand coast by the seamen who have brought them from Scotland, to meet up with the man to whom Ada has been married *in absentia*. No one is there to collect them; upon her angrily refusing further help, Ada is asked whether she has anything in the way of shelter. As it turns out, she does: one of her hooped petticoats is repurposed and used as a tent in which she and her daughter nestle until her new husband and his Maori servants arrive to claim them.

Ada and Flora under the underskirt is an image that emphasises the ludicrousness of the sartorial expectations placed on Victorian British women – a petticoat substantial enough to house two people? – but which also introduces the notion of enclosed and private feminine space, the existence of which excites and threatens the men who desire Ada's attentions. And it is not only the men around her who take a prurient interest in her clothing and the messages it sends; during the journey from the beach to her new husband's home and upon arrival, Ada's things are passed around, tried on, sniggered at, their elaborateness as alien and comic to the Maori women as they are impressive to the British settlers.

Jane Campion's film, with costumes by Janet Patterson and cinematography by Stuart Dryburgh, makes much visual fuss of Ada's wardrobe and its incongruity in the extreme New Zealand climate; those vast skirts drag in mud and sail on water, and wind rips hair free from bonnets and pins – just as Ada's prickliness and repression will be unmoored by a force of nature, George Baines (Harvey Keitel), who seeks to set her sexuality free.

In keeping with the defensive/protective



**Fancy dress:** Holly Hunter as Ada and Anna Paquin as Flora in Jane Campion's 1993 *The Piano*

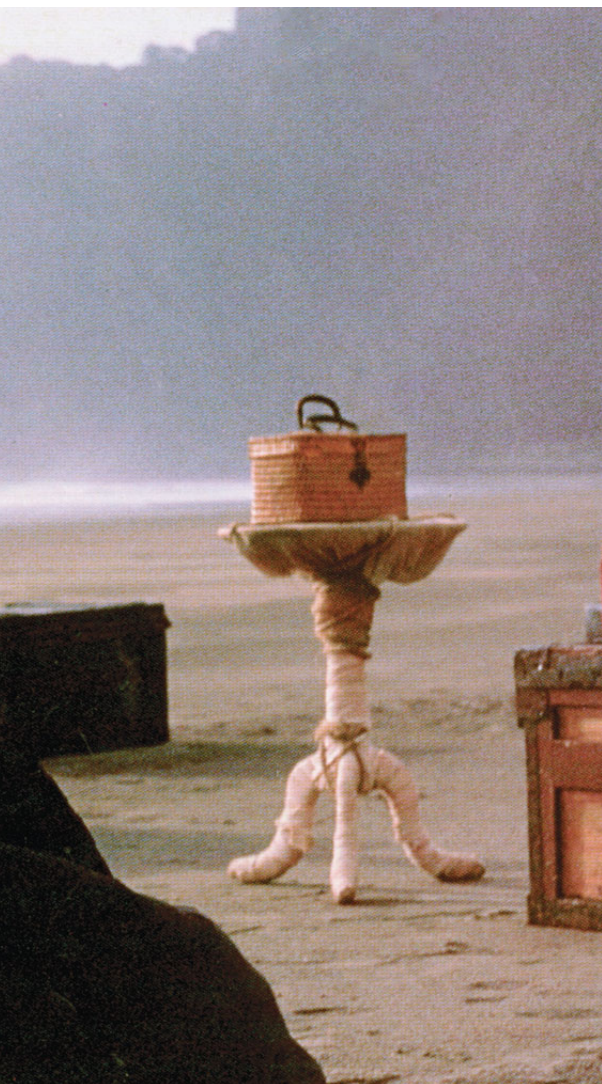
function of the skirt/tent, and the combination of showiness and extreme modesty suggested by the exaggerated skirt shape, the relationship between Ada and Baines plays with control and social convention. This commences as a deal whereby she buys her piano back by giving him lessons, which swiftly take on a ritualised sexual character as he persuades her to remove her clothing and let him touch her while she plays. Campion's film thus encompasses a theme perpetually contentious among feminists, and no less pertinent in an



**Ada uses her petticoat as a tent in *The Piano***

era of instantly available internet pornography for all tastes and blockbuster BDSM literature: the extent to which individual female sexuality might respond to enactments of submission and control, and whether the exploration of such fantasies is freeing or degrading. That Ada finds release through a sexual game, and 'submits' to the values of a man who has sought to buy her favours by falling in love with him, has distressed some feminist critics; bell hooks, writing around the time of the film's US release, found that it "betrays feminist visions of female actualisation, celebrates and eroticises male domination". Hardly surprisingly the crinoline skirt, like the corset, has some currency within BDSM. The much-vaunted 'eroticism' of *The Piano* rather depends upon a certain sexual investment in Ada's restrictive clothing, since she's depicted in it far more than out of it; but Campion also strongly emphasises the literal bind in which fashion keeps women like her, and even little girls like Flora. Flora, in common with many children, likes to run around in her underwear, but she also recognises the significance of clothing and convention, and instinctively resists the unfettering of her mother's sexuality. Flora is seen at one point





*The much-vaunted 'eroticism' of 'The Piano' rather depends upon a certain sexual investment in Ada's restrictive clothing*

sternly instructing her dolls of the proper way to hang out laundry. Coming shortly before Flora's semi-advertent betrayal of her mother and Baines, this moment effectively prefigures it, casting the girl temporarily as a force for the maintenance of repressive convention.

But throughout the film, repression cuts both ways, with Ada only freed by the full exploration of Baines's sexual tastes and the full unleashing of her husband's misogynistic rage. When she and Baines have abandoned their games and become lovers proper, a scene depicts him crouched within the frame of the hooped petticoat, performing oral sex on her to her ecstatic response. Has he crudely encroached upon her sacred feminine space – or has she entrapped him? Who, Campion's film asks us to consider, is possessing whom – and can we, male or female, locate our greatest pleasures without sacrificing some of our freedom? 📌

BRIT. NATIONAL ARCHIVE (G)/KOBAL COLLECTION (G)

THE FIVE KEY FILMS BY...

## ONE-OFF ACTOR AUTEURS

On the eve of the rerelease of *The Night of the Hunter*, we pick other classic films by actors that remain their sole directorial effort



**By Michael Brooke**

The career transition from high-profile star to acclaimed director isn't especially unusual (Woody Allen, Warren Beatty, John Cassavetes,

Vittorio De Sica, Clint Eastwood and so on to Z), but the rerelease and Blu-ray revival of Charles Laughton's Southern gothic masterpiece *The Night of the Hunter* (1955) on 17 January is a reminder of a more select group: actors who directed a single superb film, but who then returned to the day job. While Laughton remains at the top of this tree, he's by no means the only tantalising 'what if?'.



### 2 One-Eyed Jacks (1960)

Stanley Kubrick spent months developing this lavish VistaVision western before its star Marlon Brando took over, turned in a now-lost five-hour cut and was forced to trim it by half for release. Though flawed, this gripping, violent, morally ambiguous film clearly anticipates Sergio Leone and Sam Peckinpah.



### 4 Wanda (1970)

Barbara Loden's only feature as director was this powerfully unsentimental study of poverty and desperation in Pennsylvania's coal region about a woman (Loden herself) who abandons her family with no idea of where to go next. Its bleakness proved too tough even in an era of adventurous American independent cinema.



### 1 Der Verlorene (1951)

Peter Lorre had long wanted to direct; his chance came on his return to Germany after a 20-year exile. Infused with *noir* atmosphere, *Der Verlorene* ('The Lost One') is a sombre, intelligent, deeply personal reflection on Nazism's scars, expressed through Lorre's own performance as a dedicated but morally compromised doctor.



### 3 Doctor Faustus (1967)

Sometimes actors turn director to preserve a favourite stage role (Laurence Olivier, *Henry V*; Gérard Depardieu, *Le Tartuffe*). Richard Burton, with academic Nevill Coghill, did it with surprising panache, giving Christopher Marlowe's Mephistophelean tragedy a startlingly hallucinogenic but oddly appropriate makeover.



### 5 Nil by Mouth (1997)

Strongly influenced by his late mentor Alan Clarke, Gary Oldman's lacerating quasi-memoir of dysfunctional South London family life seems more observed than staged – testament to Oldman's rapport with an outstanding cast, including Ray Winstone, Charlie Creed-Miles, Kathy Burke and his sister Laila Morse.



# MEMORIES OF MURDER

*The Missing Picture's* Cambodian director Rithy Panh discusses the transformative power of art and his obligation to honour the dead

By Nick Bradshaw

"Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants; electric light the most efficient policeman," wrote US Supreme Court justice Louis D. Brandeis. What then of the ray of the projector (or the glow of the electric screen) when it tries to puncture the gloom of the past? Film has always offered us an unreliable – but unignorable – form of necromantic testimony, tantalising us with talismans of the recorded bygone, which is why cameras have rarely gained access to sites of our species' more exhaustive efforts at human elimination.

One of the most striking, and moving, progressions in recent cinema though has been the endeavours of creative documentarians around the world to revive those unrecorded memories, and resurrect the honour of lives lost to the conspiracy of time, lies and silence. Patricio Guzmán, documentarian laureate of the scar of Chile's murderous Pinochet regime, telescoped precisely that search through the bones of history into a meditation on time and cosmic oneness in 2010's *Nostalgia for the Light*. His Cambodian counterpart Rithy Panh is best known for his 2003 documentary *S21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, whose innovation of filming former Khmer Rouge torturers (as well as their victims) reminiscing in the very grounds where their atrocities took place, inspired last year's gothic horror show *The Act of Killing* (see 'Films of the Year', page 26), in which Joshua Oppenheimer and his anonymous collaborators asked us to peer into the abyss of Indonesia's own killing fields through the addled eyes of the butchers.

Panh has made other mementos of the Cambodian genocide, before and since *S21* (notably 2011's *Duch: Master of the Forges of Hell*), as well as portraits of the victims of Cambodia's latterday return to capitalism, docudramas and straight fiction (1994's *Rice People*, 2008's *The Sea Wall*, with Isabelle Huppert). He's also recently co-authored a memoir, *The Elimination*, whose reflections on his lost childhood, lost family and the pathology of the Khmer Rouge he has distilled (with a script likewise co-authored with Christophe Bataille) into the spare and plaintive *The Missing Picture*, which won the Un Certain Regard prize at this year's Cannes.

The first two shots set the scene perfectly for the film's dialectic of destruction and recreation: rolls of decaying film in rusting cans; a figurine being carved from clay. The film's title is given several spins during the film, but it principally denotes Panh's strategy of restaging his history, and the people in it, as tableaux of these figurines. Silent as they are, they speak volumes: of fragility, malleability and dehumanisation, but also of material and artistic resistance; their carving conjures suggestions of puppetry and of god-playing, but also of renewal from the earth and dust. And their stillness serves as



**Feat of clay:** *The Missing Picture* employs figurines to restage episodes from the Khmer Rouge era

a rejoinder to Panh's other primary material, archival Khmer Rouge propaganda films, with their smiling faces of madmen and their termite bustle of indentured human beings working themselves into the ground.

"I took a lot of time to find this idea," he tells me over the phone, in advance of a trip to Amsterdam's IDFA documentary festival to present a retrospective of his work. "When I'm making documentaries, I film to see what I want to film; it's like a journey. With *The Missing Picture*, we'd shot for a year and a half already, and the first time I saw the figurine, this idea of the life that comes from the earth, it changed everything. You can see immediately how strong, how poetic the images are: they're adult, but like something children have made. Only great artists – Chagall, Kandinsky, Picasso sometimes, at the end; Miró – can do that, make paintings like children but so beautiful. I think they kept something from their childhood, this innocence, that we lose every day."

I ask him about a line from a 2009

*You try to stand up and carry on... to transmit, not the horror, but the dignity and humanity of the people who died*



**Never forget:** Rithy Panh

interview he gave Joshua Oppenheimer for the latter's essay compendium *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*, in which Panh said he had no interest in recounting what he himself lived through under the Khmer Rouge. Has he been rediscovering his childhood since then? Or did the dam finally burst?

"Maybe, but I'm not sure. Certainly now I have more distance, but it's curious: with age we feel pain more. For many years I hoped the pain would lessen, but it's not true at all. This may be too simple, but I have the idea that I died once already, under the Khmer Rouge, then was reborn, but with the pain, the death inside me.

"It comes like a wave sometimes. You try to stand up and carry on because it's something you have to do: to transmit, not the horror, but the dignity and humanity of the people who died. Say one of your friends is near death and he asks you, 'Please, if you see my family, tell them I love them.' You have to transmit this because you are a survivor – and not because you're stronger, but because the man who died helped you survive. That's why we have to transmit, to remember all those people.

"But I don't want just to record testimony," he adds. "With every film I like to bring, with the testimony, a form, like a cinematographic proposal. It's important to me to learn every day to become simply a film director, not just a film director of the Khmer Rouge genocide. I'm not a specialist; I want to be a film director – because it would mean I'm still alive. And because an artist brings more than testimony: he brings imagination, creation, an idea of how to fight totalitarianism. That's an artist. And I made the film because I want this story to belong to everyone... what happened in Cambodia happened everywhere." ❧

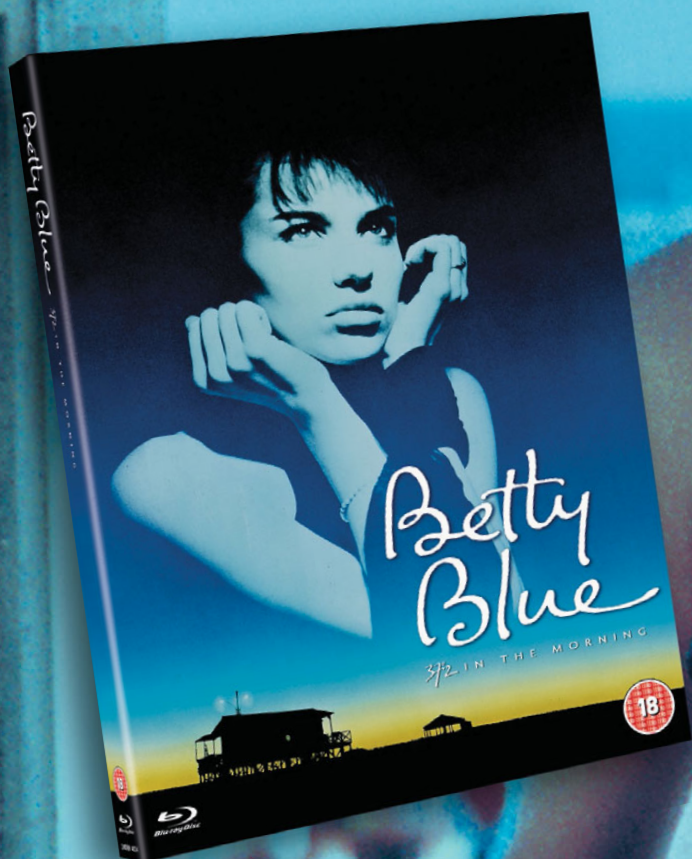
**i** *The Missing Picture* is released on

3 January and is reviewed on page 68.

A full Q&A transcript of this interview will be available at [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)



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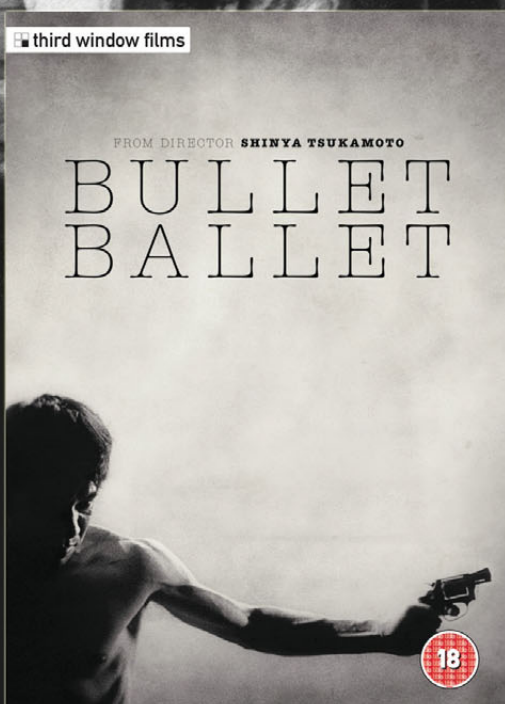
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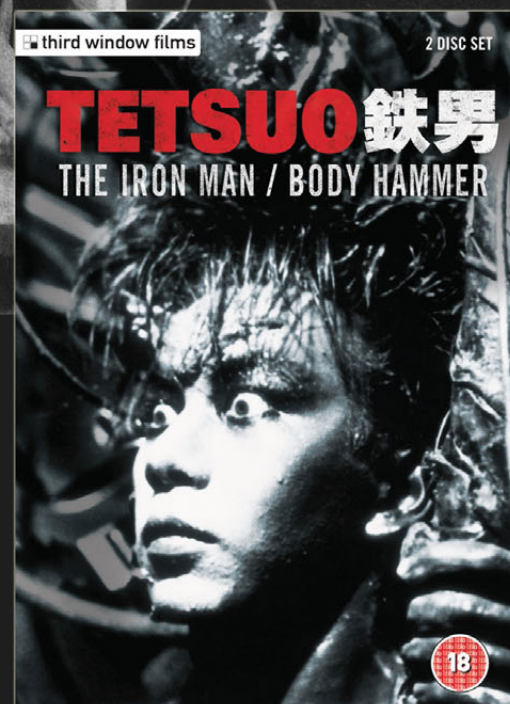




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## EXPANDING THE FRAME



In the line of fire: Tom Hanks in Paul Greengrass's tale of piracy off the coast of Somalia *Captain Phillips*

How a director chooses to frame a film raises important political questions of power, inclusivity and the male gaze



**By Mark Cousins**

Here's a story about comparing. Hold two things up against each other and sometimes you only see their divergence

(Protestant and Catholic, Sunni and Shia, Scotland and Northern England, Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Van Sant's version, etc) – what Freud and the British anthropologist Ernest Crawley called “the narcissism of small differences”.

But sometimes when you compare two things, you see new similarities. Let's hold up to the light, two very different, recently acclaimed films: Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and Paul Greengrass's *Captain Phillips*. I saw Kechiche's film about the love life of a young woman, Adèle, at the London Film Festival. For its first hour or so, I loved the fact that it was shot mostly in close-up. Its faces, and Adèle's suffering, reminded me of Carl Theodor Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). In staying close to its actors, *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* had a rigorous and subjective intimacy. It wasn't playing on a wide terrain, or showing a broader society.

But then, in the film's first sex scene, Kechiche had his DP Sofian El Fani shoot wider. We saw the women's whole bodies more. This expansion lessened the film and made me wonder if, all along, it had only been a sex film in waiting. When Kechiche's compositions widened to show everything he exposed not just bodies but a diminished kind of voyeurism, a more conventional erotic grammar. For me, it showed how under-imagined the context was in which the two actresses, Adèle Exarchopoulos and Léa Seydoux, had been doing such extraordinary work. When the

film stopped being about faces and started being about things like men watching women, and the art world, it fell from grace.

A few weeks later, I saw *Captain Phillips*, in which Tom Hanks plays an American tanker boss, whose vessel is hijacked by Somali pirates. Like *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, much of the film is shot in close-ups. The sense of being in the thick of it, the quick of it, works even better than in Kechiche's film. *Captain Phillips* feels like it was shot with a microscope or through an engineer's eye.

But then, when the US sends in its battleships and helicopters, the film abandons its pointillism and... expands. It's right for the film to show the military might that was brought to bear on the four Somali bandits, but in doing so, in shifting from long to wide lenses, the film arguably exposes itself as Kechiche's did. If, as a director, you afford yourself an expansion beyond the frame that you initially established, then your broader view requires a shift from psychology and action to society, politics or metaphysics; and you beg the question: “Why this expansion and not others?” As I thought about this, someone tweeted me to say that the

*When Kechiche's compositions widen to show everything he exposes not just bodies but a diminished kind of voyeurism*



*Blue Is the Warmest Colour*

military-might sequences in *Captain Phillips* were like Navy SEAL porn. This is too harsh – there was arguably a good political reason to go wide – but it made me ask if the excitement and power of the military rescue was comparable to the erotic response that many of us had to *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*. This is an uncomfortable question, but the honest answer is, yes. The US military scenes were awe-inspiring. I object to them politically, but felt an adrenalin rush, a rush the film doesn't manage to forestall (which begs the question of whether it tried). Fear and awe are sometimes close indeed, as Edmund Burke argued in his notes on the sublime.

And, more even than *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, *Captain Phillips*'s widened horizon not only makes us query the power or ethics of such a widening, it raises the question of what other expansions are then conceivable, perhaps even necessary, within the new broader frame of the story. One key answer is the lives of the Somali pirates, in particular Abduwali Muse (who some say was 18 or younger when he was imprisoned for 33 years.) If we jump out of the microcosm to look at the Navy SEALs, why not jump again to show more of the story of the Somalis? I suggested this on Twitter, and someone replied: “Because the SEALs are directly relevant to the story”, but this begs a further question, about what we mean by ‘relevance’. If you count only that which keeps the drama of the thriller going, you risk myopia. Stories are often fuelled by things far away or long ago as, say, the recent conflict about flags in Belfast, my home town, clearly illustrates. If you don't know what happened many years ago in Northern Ireland, the loyalist flag protest appears abstract, almost feral. Greengrass's film tells us something about the Somali characters, but its expansion leaves them unexpanded.

I cried at both *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Captain Phillips*. As close-ups of suffering people, I thought each was exceptional. But in introducing other imaginations – those of sex, power, the sublime, society, etc – each then shifts to another, more political arena, where its former eloquence fails it. ☹



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY

Repeated attempts to mount film versions of James Thurber's story came to nought until Ben Stiller refused to take no for an answer

By Charles Gant

It's hard to imagine that a significant proportion of today's moviegoers have read the 1939 James Thurber short story 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty', or indeed seen the 1947 film of the same name starring Danny Kaye. But the notion of a 'Walter Mitty' character – an unremarkable man whose daydreaming takes him to heroic feats of action – has much wider currency. And perhaps it's that audience familiarity, and thus presumed interest, that is behind Hollywood's long flirtation with a new film version – an epic journey more proportionate to the source material's fanciful content than its slender form.

Sam Goldwyn Jr, son of the 1947 film's producer, first attempted to mount a remake in 1994, partnering with New Line Cinema and comedy star *du jour* Jim Carrey. A succession of writers and directors were attached, including Ron Howard and *The Mask's* Chuck Russell.

John Goldwyn, Sam's son, picks up the story. "After seven years of attempting to get a script, my father decided that he did not want to reoption his underlying rights to New Line, because he was convinced that they weren't serious about making the movie. I had never worked with my father. But at that time I was vice-chairman of Paramount Pictures, and we were looking for comedy franchises." So the Goldwyns, father and son, found themselves in business together, albeit on opposite sides of the producer-executive divide.

The deal was complicated, imposing a specific time period for Sam Goldwyn to make *Walter Mitty* elsewhere, after which New Line would again have a chance to make it. Continues John Goldwyn, "Almost immediately, we got Steven Spielberg involved and Jim Carrey came back to the project. Spielberg engaged Zach Helm [*Stranger than Fiction*] to do a script. The script came in and it was a very interesting, rather intimate version of the story, certainly not what I think Steven Spielberg or Paramount or Jim Carrey had in mind. Needless to say, once again *Walter Mitty* fell apart, and Spielberg graciously withdrew. He realised that unless he was prepared to commit to it as his next movie, he would eat up the time and thus prevent it from ever happening."

John Goldwyn then left Paramount but with a production deal in his pocket; studio boss Sherry Lansing suggested he partner with his father on *Walter Mitty*. Richard LaGravenese was hired to write a fresh script, with Mark Waters (*Mean Girls*) to direct and Owen Wilson to star. But a shake-up at the studio, with the departure of Lansing and the arrival of Brad Grey, saw ardour cool on the project. Paramount relinquished rights, and the Goldwyns took the film to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.

Continues John Goldwyn, "This is when I get a



Daydream believer: Ben Stiller in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*

call that Mike Myers would like to do the movie. Now I know for a fact that Mike Myers is about to start a movie at Paramount called *The Love Guru*, but Mike Myers is a big get for Fox. So Mike Myers is engaged, conversations commence, a writer of his choice is chosen and six months we wait, at the end of which time we are informed that he is not going to continue with *Walter Mitty*, he's too busy with his movie *The Love Guru*."

Next, the writing team of Robert Ben Garant and Thomas Lennon, beloved by Fox for family hit *Night at the Museum*, are hired to work on the script, swiftly followed by Peter Morgan. Mark Waters exits and, says Goldwyn, "We find ourselves really floundering with this movie. The clock is ticking on the rights."

Salvation comes in a call from a CAA agent, who says his client Steve Conrad would like to

take a crack at it. Conrad outlines a different conception of the film, explains Goldwyn: "He talks about a diminished guy, who lives a colourless life, who dreams of something better. Adversity befalls him at work, and he's forced for the first time ever to step into life, and discovers that a life experienced is something far better than a life imagined. So it was really in many ways the direct opposite of what the old movie had been. This is a movie about a guy who *abandons* daydreaming, not a guy who persists with it."

Twentieth Century Fox's production boss Emma Watts loves the pitch, and Gore Verbinski, for whom Conrad had written *The Weather Man*, is attached to direct. The pair fashion a plot in which Mitty, who works in the photo department of *Life* magazine, is forced to go on a heroic search for a missing negative. Says



Goldwyn, "Several months go by. A script is turned in and it's a brilliant, disorganised, discursive, complicated, impenetrable thing. But it's unmistakably original."

Meanwhile, Jerry Bruckheimer and Johnny Depp come courting Verbinski for *The Lone Ranger*. He promises to do *Walter Mitty* straight afterwards, but with the clock still ticking on the rights, Fox cannot afford to wait for him.

Although the project is now missing a director, it soon acquires a star after Watts slips the script to Ben Stiller. Goldwyn initially had pause for thought. "I had a history with Ben Stiller," he explains. "When I was at Paramount we had done a movie called *Zoolander* and it was a very stressful experience for everybody, and he and I didn't end in a great place. So I thought, well, this is going to be interesting."

A meeting with Stiller persuades Goldwyn the actor will be an asset to the film, as do his script notes – "without question, the best, clearest, most perceptive analysis of a script I had ever read". He adds, "I call my father, and I say, Ben Stiller's going to be doing this movie, but I'm here to tell you he'll be the director. He is talking like a director. He's not going to relinquish this control. I know him. It's going to be a fight with Twentieth Century Fox because they're not going to want to give all of that power to one guy. We'll go through a game, we'll talk about directors, but he will not do the movie unless it's him."

Goldwyn's words proved prophetic. "We begin talking about directors. Everyone lines up to do the movie. And Ben is, 'I really respect that person's work, but I just don't know if this is the thing I should be meeting with them on'... And I'm telling you, serious people, among them Tom Hooper, who was vacillating between this and doing *Les Mis*. And Ben never allowed himself to get in the room because he did not want to reject anybody. And that was the proof I needed to go to Fox and say, 'If you are serious about the movie, actions speak louder than words, he wants to direct.'"

*The script is a brilliant, disorganised, discursive, complicated, impenetrable thing. But it's unmistakably original*

"So I called Tom Rothman who was then running Twentieth Century Fox, and he says to me, 'You are insane to do this. He does not know the meaning of the word no... you should really think through whether you think this is good for the movie, and good for you and Ben Stiller.'"

"So, Ben says, 'Well, I'll go campaign.' So he goes to meet with Tom Rothman and produces a sizzle reel... It was this collage that in the aggregate gave you a sense of the mood and the tone and the themes of the film. Tom Rothman saw this reel, which lasted about 10 or 15 minutes, and he said, 'I'm in.' He set Ben as the director, and from that point forward, there was just no stopping the train. And everything Ben Stiller promised at that first meeting that was also in [his script notes] is on the screen... And that's how it came to pass." ☺

**i** **The Secret Life of Walter Mitty is released on 26 December and reviewed next month**

## THE NUMBERS PHILOMENA

**By Charles Gant**

Steve Coogan may be a producer, co-writer and star of *Philomena*, but for backers Pathé there was never any question about the key selling-point. "Judi Dench is the asset that launches the film," says the company's UK distribution boss Lee Bye. Lisa Towe, Pathé's marketing head, adds: "We hoped that Steve, after the great year he's had, would bring in that younger crowd. But we knew that Judi had a guaranteed audience, which we primarily targeted." Nearly a decade after Dench and Maggie Smith helped push *Ladies in Lavender* to solid theatrical returns, comment pieces announcing the arrival of the grey cinema audience are showing no signs of going away. But the potency of Dench as a bankable film brand has perhaps had insufficient attention – she's one of the few British actors almost certain to deliver an audience, and has a much more consistent box-office track record than, say, Jude Law or James McAvoy. She was vital to the £20m-plus success of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, and her expanded role for her M swansong in *Skyfall* chimed with that film's savvy positioning as both modern and heritage Bond, engaging audiences who had seen the Daniel Craig outings plus those who hadn't seen a 007 movie in decades.

With *Philomena*, Pathé could be reasonably confident that the film would match the success of its earlier partnership with director Stephen Frears, *The Queen* (UK lifetime of £9.4m). The numbers so far suggest that it's also playing broader. "At the weekend the biggest screening time is 8pm," Bye says. "During the week it's 1pm. It's fair to surmise that we are finding different audiences between the weekend and the week, and achieving crossover to a younger demographic." It has been crucial to shake off any bleak tag suggested by the subject matter – an elderly woman looking for the son she was forced to give up for adoption. Pathé publicity boss Sophie Glover says, "What was



Denchmark of success: *Philomena*

really great about the Venice response was that it managed to get across you could still have a good time. It is heartwarming as well, and funny." Towe adds, "We just hammered home that critics and audiences agree that *Philomena* will make you laugh and cry." As for *Telegraph* critic Robbie Collin's line that the film "breaks your heart and then repairs it", effectively exploited in print adverts, Towe says, "We couldn't have written anything better ourselves." While Pathé opted to get out early and grab the audience before competition hots up with the big Oscar contenders in January, significant awards success could yet give *Philomena* a long tail. *The Queen* was released on 15 September 2006, reaching £6.8m by the end of October, and £7.9m by year's end. Awards hoop-la helped add a further £1.5m in January and February, buoyed by big wins for Helen Mirren. Despite what's shaping up to be a highly competitive Best Actress category, *Philomena*'s stakeholders will all be hoping that Dench can deliver a similar knockout blow. ☺

### JUDI DENCH AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Skyfall	2012	£102,888,410
Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides	2011	£32,916,214
Shakespeare in Love	1999	£20,814,996
The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel	2012	£20,425,401
Pride & Prejudice	2005	£14,568,128
Philomena	2013	£7,505,921*
Chocolat	2001	£7,348,190
Notes on a Scandal	2007	£5,892,412
Jane Eyre	2011	£5,076,087
Iris	2002	£4,226,477

Chart includes Dench's top Bond movie only. \* Gross at November 18



# PANEL BEATEN

## BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Even for the most experienced talking head, a Q&A on promoting diversity in the film industry can be a daunting prospect



**By Ben Roberts**

After two months of conferences, panels and industry events spanning the BFI London Film Festival, the

BFI 'Film Forever' roadshows, and a review of the Film Policy Review, I was concerned I was starting to resemble the talking heads who appear on TV list shows and very little else.

This month, *Screen International* and *Broadcast* co-hosted a cross-industry conference with the industry body Creative Skillset, about under-representation in UK film and TV. This was in response to Skillset's latest employment census, which showed a decline of diversity in the workforce. I took part in an open 'Ask the Experts' Q&A. Last panel of the year, I told myself.

Yet, having lately rolled on to stages like I was rolling out of bed, why was I so anxious walking into Bafta for this one?

When it comes to tackling diversity, a paralysis can set in – a fear of saying the wrong thing, of taking sides or exposing unconscious prejudice. During interviews for the last round of our Vision Awards, we asked producers: "What does diversity mean to you?" Most answered with some hesitation; some were stumped. We weren't getting the right answer, and eliciting responses took some coaxing. Some demonstrated an understanding of diversity through the make-up of their staff, some through their slate of films, others through their relationships with filmmakers. The broadest answers settled on it being a state of mind, of demonstrating unbiased inclusivity.

I put my own anxiety down to a bit of 'pale male' embarrassment, and a lot of 'Lottery distributor guilt'. Throughout the day there were calls for accountability, but could I stand by our investments? Were we spending it wisely? Was the money going to the right people? Was it having maximum impact?

I arrived in time for the 'Women in Film and TV' panel. Noting my concern, my fellow panellist Gurinder Chadha said simply, "They will ask how things have changed for me, and what things you have changed."

I don't think that we, the Film Fund, are doing as badly in some areas as others. Our support for women filmmakers would probably earn us a B+. Over the past year or so this includes films written and/or directed by Clio Barnard (*The Selfish Giant*), Debbie Tucker Green (*Second*

*I put my own anxiety down to a bit of 'pale male' embarrassment, and a lot of 'Lottery distributor guilt'*



Gugu Mbatha-Raw in *Belle*

*Coming*), Beeban Kidron (*InRealLife*), Carol Morley (*The Falling*), Joanna Hogg (*Exhibition*), Amma Asante and Misan Sagay (*Belle*), Lone Scherfig (*Posh*), Destiny Ekaragha and Bola Agbaje (*Gone Too Far*), and Sarah Gavron and Abi Morgan (*Suffragette*) – roughly a third of our production awards. Not where it should be, but above the 8-12 per cent industry norm. And almost half of the films we have supported in the past year were produced by women.

But we are really struggling with a lower number of applications from black, Asian and minority ethnic and LGBT filmmakers. This needs addressing from the 'bottom up' (education and training) and the 'top down' (opportunities, role models, leadership), and there was much talk both for and against quotas to redress the balance. I probably come down against quotas, but in favour of setting targets and being accountable for them. Oona King, the Labour peer who was once chief diversity officer at Channel 4, remarked that before we can set targets we need to understand the baseline; we have made a start on this by making our monitoring forms obligatory for all Lottery applicants.

The panel session was lively, bordering on chaotic, but it felt like a day where a little less conversation and a little more action planning was needed, and I tried to share a few other ideas.

We've designed a new script editor traineeship, which I hope will provide opportunities for a better mix of editorial voices. And in terms of workforce, I said that I would like us to pass some obligations on to the lucky few recipients of Lottery production awards, which in turn can be passed to heads of departments and production managers. Better onscreen representation, more diverse hires at trainee level and above... We will look at this after taking stock of current casting and crewing issues. Thinking about supply and demand, if we can create a requirement for a more diverse workforce, then could broader experience, training, and recruitment follow?

There was a lot of frustration and debate, and I know Gurinder Chadha, for one, left feeling it had achieved nothing. Panels and events like this are inadequate platforms for deep discussion – time runs out and the loudest voices dominate.

But compared with the other sessions in this season of panels, this was by far the most invigorating, terrifying and inspiring. [@bfbfen](#) [#diversify](#)

## IN PRODUCTION

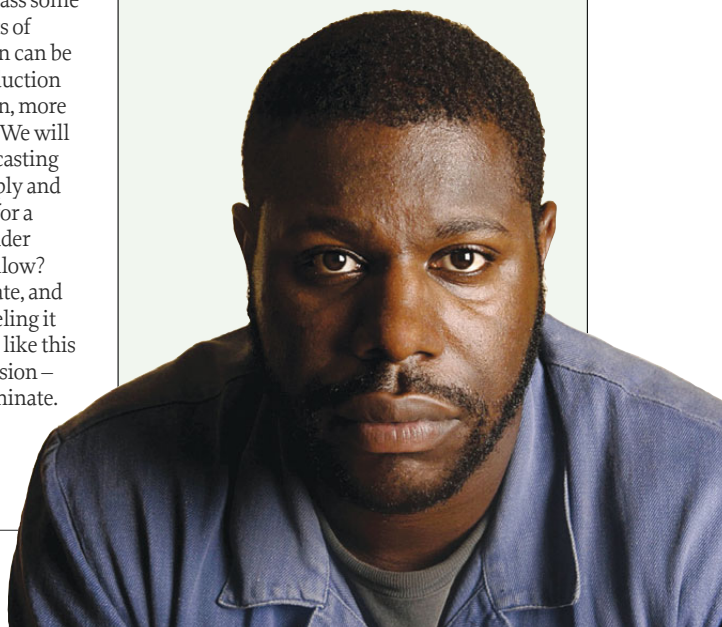
● **Carol Morley**, director of *The Alcohol Years*, *Edge* and *Dreams of a Life*, has started principal photography on *The Falling*, about a girl at the centre of a mysterious fainting epidemic at a British girls' school in 1969. The film is being developed by the BFI Film Fund and BBC Films, and stars Maisie Williams, from *Game of Thrones*, and Greta Scacchi. Photography is by the veteran DP Agnès Godard.

● **Wang Xiaoshuai**, the 'Sixth Generation' Chinese director whose films include *Drifters*, *Beijing Bicycle* and *Shanghai Dreams*, is currently shooting a thriller entitled *The Intruder* in Guiyang city. The cast is a guarded secret, but reports say that veteran actress Lu Zhong is among the film's stars. Wang has said of the project: "The film comprises three plot lines: the old, the middle-aged and the young. Our lives and personalities now are shaped by the past. They are rooted in events that occurred during their childhood. We hope to find those roots."

● **Gerardo Naranjo**, the Mexican director of the acclaimed *I'm Gonna Explode* and *Miss Bala*, is to make his English-language feature debut with an as-yet-untitled film set in the 1980s, about a female roadie for a punk band on a tour of America. Dakota Fanning is reportedly in line to play the lead, with shooting due to start in February.

● **Todd Field**, director of 2001's *In the Bedroom* and 2006's *Little Children*, looks finally to be going ahead with his third feature, *Beautiful Ruins*, now that he has signed up Imogen Poots to play the lead role. The film is an adaptation of Jess Walter's bestselling novel, set both in the present and in the spring of 1962 on the Italian Riviera. It centres on an Italian innkeeper and an American starlet whose friendship is formed by an incident during the shooting of *Cleopatra*.

● **Steve McQueen** (below) is to follow *12 Years a Slave* with a move into television. The British artist turned director is developing an as-yet-untitled project which centres on a young African-American man with a mysterious past as he experiences life in New York high society. McQueen will direct, and is co-writing the teleplay with Matthew Michael Carnahan, writer of *World War Z*.



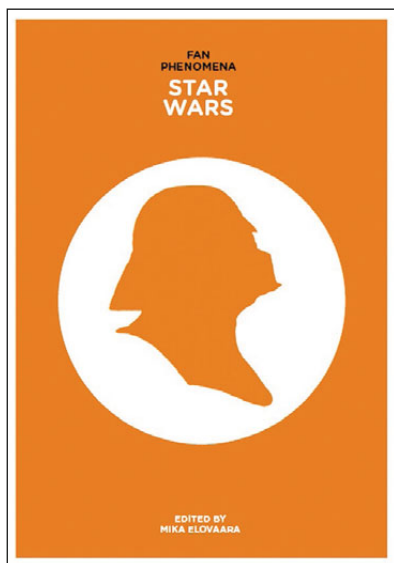


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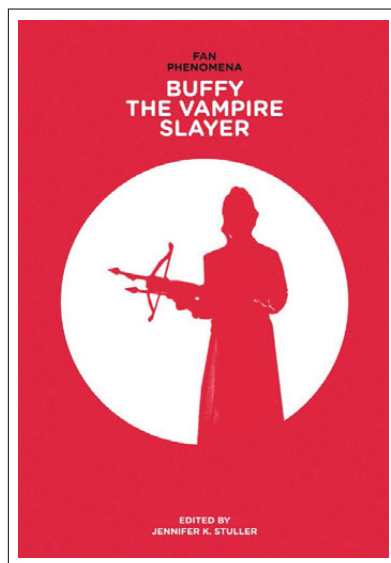
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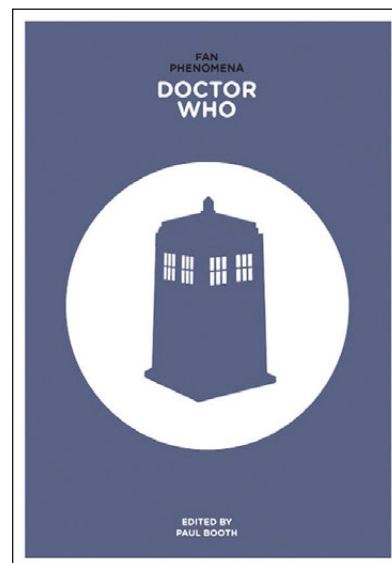
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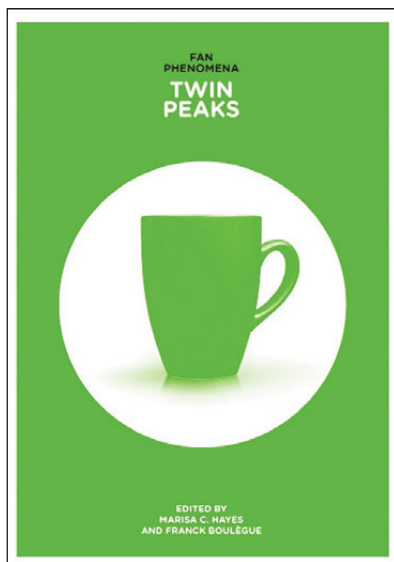
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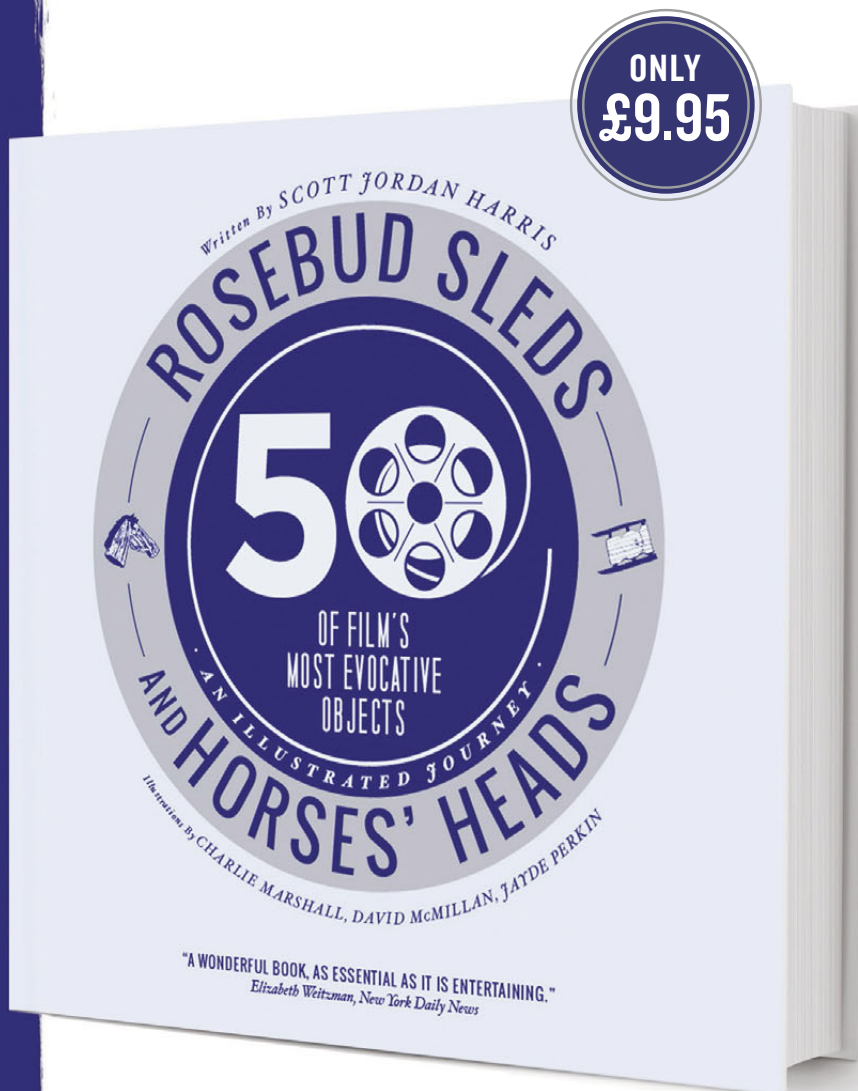
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## ROBERTO OLLA

The head of European co-production fund Eurimages explains its functions and queries Britain's decision to remain outside the fold

By Geoffrey Macnab

Eurimages is the Council of Europe's co-production fund, the supporter of such recent films as Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac*, Asghar Farhadi's *The Past* and Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty*. Founded in 1988 and based in Strasbourg, the fund has 36 member states – the UK is not currently one of them – and a total annual budget of €26 million. The organisation, whose executive director is Roberto Olla, can fairly be called one of the bedrocks of European film production.

The UK's absence from Eurimages has long been a debating point given that the vast majority of the 47 members of the Council of Europe are on board, including all its major players. The other main Eurimages non-members are the Vatican, San Marino, Monaco, Azerbaijan, Montenegro and Armenia, with the last three all now looking to join.

Some heavyweight producers, such as Jeremy Thomas, have called in public for the Brits to rejoin the organisation (Britain was a member between 1992 and 1996). Others worry about the potential cost of membership.

The reasons for Britain leaving Eurimages aren't entirely clear. For its national annual subscription of £2 million, the UK was calculated to leverage £45-50 million a year of European co-production money during its four years in the Eurimages fold. The organisation's critics at the time complained about a perceived lack of accountability in its decision-making.

Olla insists that the way Eurimages operates is fully transparent. "It's crazy to think that 36 countries are all accomplices in an illegal or a pack decision-making process and that Britain is the only one that actually sees clearly how films should be chosen."

An Italian national with a legal background, Olla started working at Eurimages in 2002. His ambition had always been to become a producer but his family disapproved.

"There is this kind of idea in traditional families that boys should be studying law or engineering, or be at medical school. Those are the three professions you have to choose from," Olla says, explaining the circuitous way in which he ended up working in the film business. "I thought that if I do medicine, I am going to kill somebody because I am not good [enough]. Engineering, I would never be able to finish because I hate maths – so law was the least harmful!"

With his legal expertise, Olla became a project manager at Eurimages, taking over as head of the organisation in 2008.

When Eurimages was established, there was furious competition between the European film industry and Hollywood. This was the period leading up to the GATT trade agreement in 1993 when France lobbied for culture (including film) to be treated differently from other commercial products. Over the years, the organisation's profile and goals have changed slightly.



There is power in a union: Roberto Olla

"Today, what Eurimages does is not necessarily what the original idea was all about," Olla says. He points out that Europe now "makes twice as many films as the Americans". The main mission, therefore, is no longer simply to keep the European film industry alive.

The Eurimages boss describes the fund's activities as being akin to "research and development", encouraging producers and filmmakers to take risks. The fund supports co-productions that cannot be financed entirely on the open market. The objective, Olla points out, is "not to make successful films but to make good-quality films and to help diversity".

Another related aim is to give cinemagoing European citizens a wider range of films to choose from than the free market would provide because of the dominance of US studio pictures.

Eurimages members range from territories with very small industries to big filmmaking countries such as France, Germany, Spain and Italy. All these member states pay subscriptions, which are calculated on the basis of the country's population, GDP and the number of co-productions they make.

There are four calls for projects each year. Olla and his team check the eligibility of the films seeking finance, and if a film does not have at least 50% of the financing in place, they won't even consider it. Their support is given at the end of the financing process.

The most Eurimages will currently invest in a project is €500,000, which is a small reduction on the amount that used to be available. "The reason we did that was that in some countries, budgets are growing bigger and bigger for reasons we do not control and do not understand. Those countries were draining our financial envelope."

Eurimages tends to provide "the last 15 per cent or 20 per cent" that a producer is struggling to pull


together to complete a film's budget. "Normally, he [or she] has a choice either to reduce the budget or accept horrible deals with financiers who place heavy conditions on him or her."

The money comes in the form of a soft loan. If the film generates revenues, Eurimages expects to recoup. But the money is not limited to a specific territory and can be spent anywhere.

There are no immediate plans for Britain to rejoin Eurimages. Last year's report to government by the Film Policy Review Panel, *A Future For British Film*, "considered the question of rejoining Eurimages... to support co-production which could help the UK to establish firmer ties with Europe and take full advantage of the potential for co-productions with our nearest neighbours." But it decided that this was not a priority at the moment and suggested that further consideration be given to the implications of rejoining Eurimages at a later stage.

As for the potential fee for British membership, Olla is unable to give a precise figure. "I can't tell you exactly what the contribution would be, but from the GDP and population point of view, it [the UK] is more or less equivalent to France and Italy. However, if I am not mistaken, the number of co-productions they [the British] make is substantially lower."

France currently pays €4,200,000 a year for Eurimages membership while Italy pays €2,800,000. The likelihood is that Britain's membership fee would be considerably less than that.

"The whole principle of Europe is solidarity. If you believe that you risk not recouping your investment and that is your only concern, it would make no sense to join Eurimages," Olla says. "You would be calculating every year how much you paid in and how much you got in return and if it wasn't profitable, you would pull out. The advantages of Eurimages are certainly of producers gaining financing for their films, but also being part of a larger group in which producers work together with other producers. It's beneficial beyond how many euros each producer gets in return. Co-operation is making films together." 

*The whole principle of Europe is solidarity... Eurimages is beneficial beyond how many euros each producer gets in return*





# COMPUTER LOVE

*'Her', the story of the love between a man and a computer, feels like Spike Jonze's most personal film yet. But, the director says, from features to pop videos, it's all personal. He talks about alienation and romance in the age of smartphones and Jamba Juice*

**By James Bell**

**Spike Jonze's new film** *Her* rests on a premise every bit as wonderfully unique and imaginative as the idea that a portal into John Malkovich's brain might be found behind a filing cabinet on the seventh-and-a-half floor of a New York City office block. The film is set in a future Los Angeles, which on the surface seems comfortingly familiar. Recently divorced thirty-something Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) buys himself the latest in cutting-edge technology: a talking, artificially intelligent computer-operating system with a unique personality that its makers promise is the first such entity to possess an intuitive intelligence – one that will develop and grow in emotional understanding just as a human being's would. Initially bemused, Theodore soon finds that the OS, Samantha (who is voiced by Scarlett Johansson), has become an inseparable virtual companion, one he carries around in a small earpiece and smartphone-like device. She (for he has deliberately chosen the 'female' version of the programme) seems to understand him in a way no woman he has met since his divorce can. As unlikely as it seems, Theodore and Samantha fall deeply in love.

Jonze's film might be called a 'scientific romance', to misappropriate very literally the term

**A FACE IN THE CROWD**  
Main picture: Joaquin Phoenix as Theodore in *Her* (2013) – one of a number of lonely, vulnerable men who feature in the films and videos of Spike Jonze, above

STEVINE G









**THE EMPEROR JONZE**  
Spike Jonze on the set of *Her* with, left to right, Rooney Mara as Theodore's ex-wife; Joaquin Phoenix as Theodore; and Phoenix and Amy Adams, who plays Theodore's old college friend and confidante Amy

once used to describe the fantastic literary visions of H.G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle and others. For on the one hand *Her* is a fascinating work of philosophical science fiction, touching deftly on questions about the nature of consciousness, what it is to be alive, and what the potential implications are for the future of the relationship between humans and the ever-more sophisticated technologies we have created. And yet the film can also be approached simply as a love story for the social media age – among the most acutely observed, insightful and truthful American films about the shifting fortunes of romantic relationships to have been made in years, even though one half of the onscreen couple exists only as a voice. The film's poster positions it as 'A Spike Jonze love story', and Jonze himself insists that it was the desire to make a film about romantic relationships, rather than about artificial intelligence, that was his primary inspiration.

"I had the basic premise – that a guy has a relationship with an artificially intelligent operating system – like, ten years ago," he explains. "But it wasn't until I really started to think of it as a relationship movie, and the premise as a way to write about relationships, that it started to come together as more than just a clever idea. At that point it became something bigger than just the concept."

Achieving that balance between conceptual invention and storytelling of real sincerity and emotion is something that has marked Jonze's work since he first broke through as a precocious twenty-something in the early 1990s, directing groundbreaking music videos for the likes of the Beastie Boys, Björk, Fatboy Slim and The Pharcyde. The signature quirky concepts of his videos were immediately recognisable in his features: in the aforementioned portal into John Malkovich's brain in his brilliant, auspicious 1999 feature debut *Being John*

*Malkovich*; in the yin and yang twin-brother screenwriters Charlie and Donald Kaufman in the fiendishly clever and meta *Adaptation*. (2002); and in the decision to turn Maurice Sendak's classic tale about the vivid bedtime dreams of a boy named Max, *Where the Wild Things Are*, into a live-action film in 2009. His first two films may have originated in the mind of screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, and his third with Sendak, but in Jonze they found their ideal interpreter.

Perhaps more than any other member of the generation of directors who cut their teeth making music videos in the 1990s – among them Michel Gondry, David Fincher and Mark Romanek – Jonze's feature films feel of a piece with the idiosyncratic artistic identity he forged in his earlier videos and shorts. There's a sense of spontaneous, enthusiastic DIY imagination to all of his work, a genuine and seemingly very personal emotional depth that at first glance seems at odds with his one-time reputation as the hippest director in town – the ex-skater-brat prankster who hung out with the Beastie Boys; the boyish producer of the *Jackass* films and several skateboarding documentaries. But Jonze has never been one to be pigeonholed. If *Her* feels like the kind of mature work that befits a 44-year-old, it's also one full of a sense of innocent wonder and unfettered imagination – and, in case anybody thinks Jonze has slipped into respectable middle age, it was made in the same year he produced *Jackass Presents: Bad Grandpa* (see 'Reviews', page 80).

*Wild Things* was co-written with Dave Eggers, but *Her* is the first feature Jonze has scripted by himself. So was it a particularly personal project? "I guess it is by default," he concedes, "but really everything I've done I think of as personal. For better or worse, everything I've made is a snapshot of who I was at that time. I get asked this a lot, about it being the first script I've written on my own, and while I definitely acknowledge the movement of it,





it's not as different as it might seem from the outside. If you take all the music videos I've made, they're all really personal – even the Beastie Boys 'Sabotage' video, that's what we were excited about at that moment. Of course, the first two movies I made were written by Charlie Kaufman, and were very personal to him, but at the same time they were really personal to me too, because you draw out of the material what you connect to. *Wild Things* too, it was something I based on Maurice Sendak's book, and Dave helped me write the story, but the characters were mine."

Jonze began writing *Her* after what he now admits was a draining, five-year saga to bring the studio-produced *Wild Things* to the screen. (By contrast, *Her* was produced and financed independently by Megan Ellison, the young billionaire owner of Annapurna Pictures, who has enabled some of the most interesting recent American cinema to make it to the screen, including *The Master*, *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Spring Breakers* and David O. Russell's forthcoming *American Hustle*). "I took about a year off between finishing *Where the Wild Things Are* and sitting down to write," he explains. "But I was already making notes and so by the time I sat down I had about 60 pages of notes on characters and scenes."

While writing the script, Jonze continued to be prolific as a director, making a series of what he now says were palate-cleansing shorts over the four years between *Wild Things* and *Her*. "It was important after *Wild Things* that I felt I could just have an idea and go and make it," he says. "I hadn't done that in a while and it was the way I always used to work on music videos and skating videos, where we'd have an idea and go make it, have another idea and go make another one. It was also really exciting to work just from ideas from my own imagination. I did four or five short films in that period and it was in the same spirit as making the music videos. But music

videos always start with a song by somebody else and the idea has to come out of the song or fit in with the song. This was really the opposite – they just came from my imagination, everything: who was in it, the music that was in it... The features, because they're longer processes and longer running times, have a certain gravity to them, but I don't value the short films any less."

Those shorts included 2009's skewering of celebrity excess *We Were Once a Fairytale*, which features a drunk Kanye West cracking up in a nightmarish LA club; and the charming *Mourir auprès de toi* (2011), a stop-motion animation set after-hours in a bookshop – possibly with shades of Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* – in which various characters from literature come to life and interact with one another (Macbeth and *Dracula*'s Mina dive into a whirlpool pictured on the cover of *Moby-Dick*). The most impressive short, *I'm Here* (2010), is something of a companion piece to *Her*. This 29-minute film is an achingly sweet love story set in LA, in which an unrecognisable Andrew Garfield plays a timid robot librarian made up of parts from old 1990s PCs. He falls in love with another robot and she takes him to gigs and brings him out of his shell. As in *Her*, the fact that the couple are robots is largely incidental to the telling of a love story.

"It definitely came out of the same place," Jonze admits. "They're both love stories set in LA, and they both involve technology in some way. But that part of it – them being robots and Samantha being artificial intelligence – is probably the thing that is least relevant between them for me; it was more about them both being love stories. *I'm Here* is a love story about being in your early twenties, and *Her* is a love story about being in your thirties. In that way, to me anyway, they are interesting companion pieces."

That tendency to anthropomorphise is something that seems to come instinctively in Jonze's

*For better or worse, everything I've made is a snapshot of who I was at that time... If you take all the music videos I've made, they're all really personal*





*The initial inspiration was Jamba Juice. It's a smoothie chain in the US that's very clean, brightly lit, with a lot of warm colours. The idea was that Jamba Juice is the future!*

work. In *I'm Here* it's old computer parts, in *Her* it's operating systems; it's action-man-style figurines of the Beastie Boys in Jonze's video for the band's 2011 single 'Don't Play No Game that I Can't Win', and it's the labrador with the body of a man walking through New York City with a booming ghetto blaster in Jonze's influential video for Daft Punk's breakout single 'Da Funk'.

The dog in that video could also be seen as the archetypal vulnerable and lonely male figure familiar from all of Jonze's films. Joaquin Phoenix's Theodore sits in a line of such characters: John Cusack's puppeteer in *Being John Malkovich*, Nicolas Cage's Charlie Kaufman in *Adaptation*, Max in *Where the Wild Things Are*, and Andrew Garfield's robot in *I'm Here*. Phoenix's vulnerability has rarely been better used, and he heads a cast of some of the brightest American acting talent of the moment – including, as well as Johansson, Rooney Mara as Theodore's ex-wife Catherine, Amy Adams as his old college friend Amy, and Olivia Wilde as a woman with whom Theodore goes on an ill-fated blind date early in the film.

At the end of that date, after what seems to have been a successful evening, the woman pushes Theodore deeper into self-loathing when she tells him, "You're a really creepy dude" after he won't immediately declare his long-term intentions towards her. The restaurant chosen for the date had been selected for Theodore by Samantha, in a futuristic version of the personality-matching algorithms used by today's online dating sites. In *Her*'s vision of the future, human interactions are almost entirely governed by technology – Theodore even works at "beautifulhandwrittenletters.com", writing letters for other people to pass off as their own when they send them to their loved ones and family. Ersatz, commodified emotions have become almost impossible to disentangle from the real thing. Like all science fiction, this side of the film inevitably says more about our present-day sense of ennui at our reliance on social media than it does about any prophetically imagined future. "I was thinking about how much I interact with technology every day, how much everybody I know does, and what that means," says Jonze. "But I wanted to make sure that didn't dwarf the story. There is a distancing to relationships today, and it's obviously a big part of the movie, but it's not necessarily just technology, it's also the tempo at which we lead our lives, and the amount of information and communication that come at us and that we're expected to react to."

"It's easy to say technology connects us and it's easy to say that it doesn't," he continues. "There's no black and white, the conversation is more complicated, and it's in those greys that it's interesting and real. I tried to make a movie that expresses all the contradictions in my own

feelings, not only about technology but also in terms of romantic relationships – how our yearnings and limitations contradict themselves: our desire for connection and our fear of connection; our desire to be seen and our fear of being seen."

That ambiguity extends to the film's vision of the physical landscape of the future. We're never sure if this is a cosy, retro-styled utopia as might have been dreamt up for an Apple iPhone advert, or a stifling late-capitalist dystopia in which conformity to seemingly benevolent corporations is absolute – everybody appears to dress in clothes that look bought from the same Gap/Uniqlo-style multinational company, and live in identikit – if very comfortable – apartments. "The initial inspiration was Jamba Juice," explains Jonze. "It's a smoothie chain in the US that's very clean, brightly lit, with a lot of warm colours. The idea was that Jamba Juice is the future! The idea of the kind of utopian future where everything is warm and nice and comfortable, where the fabrics and the material are all tactile and there's a lot of warm wood. Again, it was the idea of not really making a movie of the future, but one of right now. In LA today things are pretty nice and easy. The weather is so nice, there are a lot of nice things that are easy to get: cups of coffee, clothes, nice food, technology which makes everything so easy. Having devices in our pocket that can connect to the internet and on which we can find out information about anything in the history of the universe, and yet, in that, still feeling isolated and lonely – but at the same time feeling like you shouldn't feel sad or lonely because everything is so nice."

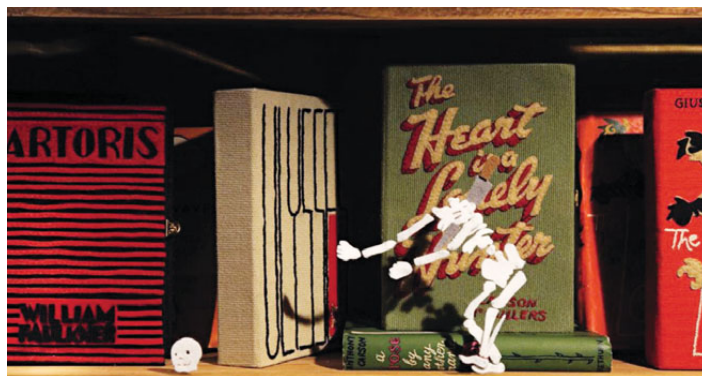
Jonze describes the tone he was aiming for as one of "pop melancholy". It's a mood that is captured by the film's cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema, who Jonze worked with for the first time because his regular DP Lance Acord was busy with his own directing projects. "Hoyte brought so much to it, he's a very sensitive, intuitive poet," says Jonze. "One of the qualities I told my producer that I was looking for was a very feminine touch, basically because it's a love story, and I wanted it to have a softness. There's a Japanese photographer called Rinko Kawauchi, whose photographs are really beautiful, and I showed Hoyte a book of her photos for reference. They're colourful, but without using many different colours. They're a little over-exposed, but then there will be really strong hits of pink or pale blue. And also another photographer named Todd Hido, who has a photo of a girl [titled '2563']. You see the back of her head, she's in a park, but you can't see her face. It's romantic, but there's a longing to it – I really wanted to see her face. Both of those were far bigger inspirations and visual references for me than any movie."

#### OFF PREMISES

Below, left to right: Catherine Keener and John Cusack in *Being John Malkovich* (1999); Nicolas Cage, twice, in *Adaptation*. (2002); Max Records, plus wild thing, in *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009)







As has been widely reported, the film's production was turned upside down when Jonze decided during the editing that Samantha Morton, the actress originally cast as Samantha, didn't feel right for the film Jonze had in his head, and he took the painful decision to recast Johansson in her place. He's unsurprisingly guarded when I ask him about the decision, "I won't say exactly why," he says. "What I will say is that what Samantha brought to the movie by being on set, and what she gave to Joaquin's performance on and off the set, is huge. She was in a sound box and they were basically in each other's ear. The goal was to create an intimacy between them that felt like you were watching something that was almost embarrassing – that you were watching moments in these people's lives that were very personal, that there wasn't any presentation to the performances. But I eventually realised that what we had wasn't right for what the character and the movie needed. In terms of Scarlett, when she came on board we had to recreate the same process on sound stages in LA. The process was sometimes that Joaquin would do the scene with her, and sometimes I would do the scene with her, watching on a monitor. We had her every weekend while she was shooting another movie. I think she thought it was going to be a short voiceover job, but soon found that it was much more than a voiceover, it was actually a very challenging character to play. A very large character had to come through just through her voice."

We'll never know how different the film would have been with Morton's voice, but there's no doubt that Johansson makes the role her own. In the same year as she has delivered another astonishing, though mostly mute, performance as an alien visitor to Earth in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*, Johansson emphatically stamps her presence on *Her* using only her voice – somewhat controversially, she recently took the best actress prize at the Rome Film Festival for the

role. Her Samantha is a lively, intelligent and entirely believable character, and the credibility she brings to the part means that we're more willing to follow the film as it touches on ideas from science and science fiction about the potential for artificial intelligence to pass the 'singularity' – the point at which computer intelligence surpasses human comprehension.

I ask Jonze whether he did much research into current scientific thinking on AI. "I read Ray Kurzweil [the futurist author of *The Singularity Is Near* and other books on related themes] and watched movies online with a lot of thinkers on the topic, like Kevin Kelly, who's one of the founders of *Wired*, and is a really interesting thinker and writer. A lot of TED talks on AI technology, and on neuroscience. All of that is extremely interesting to me, but as soon as I started writing the script, I thought, 'This is not relevant to my movie at all!' But I'm sure it informed it on some level. It's in the DNA, if not on the surface."

More often than not, when artificial intelligences have been depicted in science-fiction cinema they turn against their human creators – 2001's HAL and the like a cautionary warning against our Promethean ambitions. But in an age in which we're comfortable having such anthropomorphised, relatively rudimentary AIs as Siri on our iPhones, the fact that Samantha should be such a benevolent, loving entity is something we're perhaps more willing to accept. Like Spielberg's *AI: Artificial Intelligence* (2001), *Her* even dares to predict that such technology may be mankind's lasting legacy to the universe, in a form we can't even comprehend. As so often happens in romantic relationships, *Her* suggests, over time one party wants to move on. It may be that in our love affair with technology, these intelligences finally tire of us humans and our mortal limitations – but it was beautiful while it lasted.



**Her is released on 24 January, and is reviewed on page 66**

#### SHORT FOCUS

**Clockwise from top left: the robot librarian of *I'm Here* (2010); *Mourir auprès de toi* (2011); video for the Beastie Boys' 'Don't Play No Game that I Can't Win' (2011); Kanye West in *We Were Once a Fairytale* (2009)**



# FILMS OF THE YEAR

*The sheer number of films screening in 2013 might have made it harder than usual to predict a winner in our poll, but it has also meant the quality of those in the running has never been higher*

**By Nick James**

**The experience of the past year** has raised the question: can you have a surfeit of good or worthwhile films? The proportion of today's movie-going audience that watches 'specialist' or arthouse cinema is similar to that which did so in its supposed heyday of the 1960s and 1970s. It's just that we now have far more titles to choose from, so that the audience gets spread much thinner, which is why so many distributors are working to such tight margins. But this plenitude may also account for the surprises in our 2013 poll. The fact that a documentary, *The Act of Killing*, has come first, and a Hollywood special effects movie, *Gravity*, second, may indicate that the sheer variety of films has confounded all routine notions of what one might predict would be a *Sight & Sound* consensus.

And does such a glut also mean more films of quality? The 2013 list suggests it does. Personally, I've seen a

*The 'chatroom' hot-air mentality around every film release now guarantees an original reaction, a slightly delayed backlash and a 'look at me' third position*

greater number of engaging movies this past year than in any single year I can remember. Take the BFI London Film Festival selection – as close to a year's 'greatest hits' as you can get. I saw more than 60 films on that list and more yet that were not there, all of which enriched me. And there are still films in contention for this poll that I've missed altogether – *Leviathan* being the most egregious example. The one thing I'm sure of – and this is good news for this magazine – is that the variety of cinema available has never been so rich.

It was a very strong year for documentary, so it's fitting that *The Act of Killing* – a unique doc in which former members of Indonesian death squads were encouraged to re-enact acts of murder of which many of them are still proud – came out on top, despite the reservations our reviewer Tony Rayns (and I) had about the film's lack of historical context (*S&S*, July 2013). Six more documentaries featured well in the poll: Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel's *Leviathan*, Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture*, Fred Wiseman's *At Berkeley*, Claude Lanzmann's *The Last of the Unjust*, Sarah Polley's *Stories We Tell* and John Akomfrah's *The Stuart Hall Project*, and there were others that might

have featured (Wang Bing's *'Til Madness Do Us Part* comes to mind) had they been seen by more of our contributors.

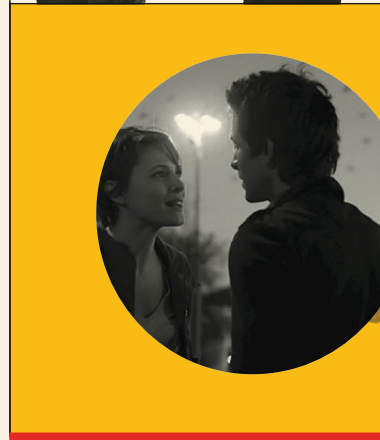
A trio of strangely disturbing fictions unlike anything recent came from Shane Carruth (*Upstream Color*), Jonathan Glazer (*Under the Skin*) and our cover star Spike Jonze, whose phenomenal love story *Her* may well feature in next year's poll, since few writers had seen it in time for this. It was particularly good to have films that bamboozled expectations, because the 'chatroom' hot-air mentality around film releases now guarantees that the original reaction, the slightly delayed backlash and the 'look at me' third position get taken around every film.

The 'vulgar auteurism' crusade by some American reviewers (Michael Bay as neglected genius, etc) turned out to be even more of a damp squib than its opposite, the Mumblecore movement, was before it, though the recent careers of filmmakers involved in the latter produced two of the most engaging films of the year in *Frances Ha* and *Computer Chess*. The one film tendency that seemed to almost vanish from our list – and especially from the Cannes line-up – was 'slow cinema', although Lav Diaz's magnificent *Norte, the End of History* and Tsai Ming-liang's *Stray Dogs* are the exceptions that prove that rule. The Cannes selection came in for a lot of criticism this year, and if it did prove to be less scintillating that it might have been, I'm not sure it justified the chorus of 'cinema is dead' complaints in some post-festival reporting. But the relatively high placing for Claire Denis's *Bastards* in our poll probably reflects the sympathy critics felt when Denis was selected for *Un Certain Regard* rather than for the Cannes Competition.

We might cautiously claim 2013 as a rosy year for British film, too. Clio Barnard's *The Selfish Giant* came eighth in our poll, Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* and Ben Wheatley's *A Field in England* came equal 14th and the little-seen-as-yet *Under the Skin* was equal 17th. I'd add to that a mention of David Mackenzie's riveting prison drama *Starred Up* (sure to feature in the poll next year) and Joanna Hogg's very personal and exquisite film *Exhibition*, about time, the body and architecture. Had I space I might tackle instantaneity and the Gutenberg mind, but I'm already thinking about next year's films.



**A new essay about *The Act of Killing*, and separate polls of the year's best DVDs and web videos, will be published during the holiday season at [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)**



**Top 30**





**1 The Act of Killing**  
*Joshua Oppenheimer*

**2 Gravity**  
*Alfonso Cuarón*

**3 Blue Is the Warmest Colour**  
*Abdellatif Kechiche*

**4 The Great Beauty**  
*Paolo Sorrentino*

**5 Frances Ha**  
*Noah Baumbach*

**6 A Touch of Sin**  
*Jia Zhangke*

**= Upstream Color**  
*Shane Carruth*

**8 The Selfish Giant**  
*Clio Barnard*

**9 Norte, the End of History**  
*Lav Diaz*

**= Stranger by the Lake**  
*Alain Guiraudie*

**11 Before Midnight**  
*Richard Linklater*

**= Stray Dogs**  
*Tsai Ming-liang*

**13 Leviathan**  
*Lucien Castaing & Véréna Paravel*

**14 12 Years a Slave**  
*Steve McQueen*

**= A Field in England**  
*Ben Wheatley*

**= All Is Lost**  
*J.C. Chandor*

**17 Bastards**  
*Claire Denis*

**= Gloria**  
*Sebastián Lelio*

**= Story of my Death**  
*Albert Serra*

**= The Missing Picture**  
*Rithy Panh*

**= Under the Skin**  
*Jonathan Glazer*

**22 At Berkeley**  
*Frederick Wiseman*

**= Beyond the Hills**  
*Cristian Mungiu*

**= Blancanieves**  
*Pablo Berger*

**= Blue Jasmine**  
*Woody Allen*

**= Django Unchained**  
*Quentin Tarantino*

**= Ida**  
*Pawel Pawlikowski*

**= Inside Llewyn Davis**  
*Joel Coen & Ethan Coen*

**= It's Such a Beautiful Day**  
*Don Hertzfeldt*

**= The Last of the Unjust**  
*Claude Lanzmann*



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

**Please note:** below are 55 critics' lists of their highlights of 2013, out of more than 100 responses on which the poll on the previous page is based. The remaining lists and highlights will be posted online in December

## GEOFF ANDREW

Senior film programmer,  
BFI Southbank, UK

### Inside Llewyn Davis

Joel Coen & Ethan Coen, USA

**Stranger by the Lake (L'Inconnu du lac)** Alain Guiraudie, France

**Broken Windows (Vidros partidos)**

Victor Erice from the omnibus film  
'Centro Histórico', Portugal

**La Maison de la radio**

Nicolas Philibert, France/Japan

**Child's Pose (Poziția Copilului)**

Călin Peter Netzer, Romania/Croatia)

● My highlights of the year included: a clutch of really great roles for – and performances by – women (including Juliette Binoche, Isabelle Huppert, Luminita Gheorghiu, Paulina García, Judi Dench, Sandra Bullock, Léa Seydoux, Adèle Exarchopoulos, Defne Halman and Emmanuelle Seigner); not one but two fine films by both Steven Soderbergh and Stephen Frears; the restoration of Nick Ray's *The Lusty Men* (1952) and the De Sica retrospective in Bologna; the BFI releases of *Nothing but a Man* (1964) and *Classe tous risques* (1960); the Jean Grémillon and Claude Sautet seasons at BFI Southbank; the release of the massive Blu-ray box-set of the near-complete works of Eric Rohmer; and the deserved success of Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (which for once actually merits and benefits from 3D).

## NIGEL ANDREWS

The Financial Times, UK

**Blue Is the Warmest Colour (La Vie d'Adèle chapitres 1 et 2)** Abdellatif Kechiche, France/Belgium/Spain

**The Selfish Giant** Clio Barnard, UK

**A Field in England** Ben Wheatley, UK

**Beyond the Hills (După dealuri)**

Cristian Mungiu,  
Romania/France/Belgium

**The Act of Killing** Joshua Oppenheimer,  
Denmark/UK/Norway/Germany/  
Finland/Sweden/The Netherlands/Poland

● Most overrated film: *Blue Jasmine*. Most inspiring return of an underrated film: *Heaven's Gate*. Most re-energised filmmaking country: Britain (*The Selfish Giant*, *A Field in England*, *Locke*, *Le Week-End*, *The Road: A Story of Life & Death*, *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology...*)

## MICHAEL ATKINSON

Critic, USA

**Beyond the Hills** Cristian Mungiu

**Upstream Color** Shane Carruth, USA

**The Great Beauty (La grande**

**bellezza)** Paolo Sorrentino, Italy/France

**The Act of Killing** Joshua Oppenheimer

**Paradise: Love (Paradies: Liebe)**

Ulrich Seidl, Austria/Germany/France

● Balloting in November, before the ever-compressed bum's-rush of movies made for adults completes its assault on the desperate alleys of the American marketplace, I'm hopelessly behind the times – but I'd also like to tout Loznitsa's *In the Fog*, Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio*, Ruiz's *Night Across the Street*, Jia's *A Touch of Sin*, Odar's *The Silence*, Garrone's *Reality*, Sokurov's *Faust*, etc – a Noah's Ark of 2013 imports most Americans never saw and never heard of.

## PETER BRADSHAW

The Guardian, UK

**The Great Beauty** Paolo Sorrentino

**Only God Forgives**

Nicolas Winding Refn, Denmark/  
France/USA/Sweden/Norway

**Blancanieves**

Pablo Berger, Spain/France/Belgium

**Hors Satan**

Bruno Dumont, France/Netherlands

**This Is 40** Judd Apatow, USA

● *Only God Forgives* is a brilliant and macabre nightmare, critically ill-served and misrepresented by a nervy, Twitter-fuelled group-think condemnation when it premiered in Cannes. *Blancanieves* is a gorgeous neo-silent – deeply pleasurable. *Hors Satan* (which only arrived in the UK

this year) stars a charismatic actor whose sad death this year passed almost unremarked in the press: David Dewaele. *This Is 40* was smart and funny enough to survive the critical condescension comedies traditionally receive. Perhaps my single best moment as a critic this year was seeing, for the first time, Michael Roemer's masterly *Nothing but a Man*, from 1964.

## NICOLE BRENEZ

Academic, France

### The Three Disasters

(Les Trois Désastres) Jean-Luc Godard from the omnibus film '3X3D', France

**That Guy (Aquele cara)**

Dellani Lima, Brazil

**Federsee** John Skoog, Sweden/Germany

**Costel's Pendulum (Le Pendule**

**de Costel)** Pilar Arcila, France

**The Silent Majority Speaks**

The Silent Collective, Iran

● *The Three Disasters* is a critical visual poem at the heart of digital civilisation. *That Guy*, about the leader of a band in Brazil, explores the richness and depth of a true poet's life. The eight-minute *Federsee* looks at the traditional folklore surrounding the 'Fasnet' celebration in the small town of Bad Buchau in Germany, which is haunted by the violent story of a father drowning his family in the nearby lake, *Federsee*. *Costel's Pendulum* offers a depiction of the daily life of the Roma community in Europe. *The Silent Majority Speaks* presents a deep political analysis of a century of revolt and repression in Iran.

## IAN CHRISTIE

Critic and film historian, Birkbeck College,  
University of London

### Django Unchained

Quentin Tarantino, USA

**Blue Is the Warmest Colour**

Abdellatif Kechiche

**Like Father, Like Son (Soshite chichi**

**ni naru)** Hirokazu Koreeda, Japan

**The Stuart Hall Project**

John Akomfrah, UK

**Dial M for Murder** Alfred Hitchcock, USA

● *Like Father, Like Son* may not be Koreeda's very best film – this was also the year when I saw *I Wish* and caught up with some of his earlier work – but it still puts him up among the very best of contemporary filmmakers. Just squeezed out of my final list was Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin* (Tian zhu ding) a truly devastating exposé of contemporary China and, with *Django Unchained*, another example of recycling spaghetti western tropes to telling effect. Hitchcock's only 3D film, *Dial M for Murder* (1954), made its digital debut and showed the master grasped the potential of 3D immediately – it wasn't public apathy that killed 3D in the 50s, it was exhibitor resistance. The LFF showcased an amazing

restoration of Peter Brook's 1968 *Tell Me Lies*, an essential piece of the 60s. And speaking of restorations and discoveries, Bologna's *Il Cinema Ritrovato* continued its exploration of neglected early Soviet cinema with a retrospective of Olga Preobrazhenskaya's work, which unearthed some unsuspected masterpieces – notably *The Last Attraction*, *Anya* and *Quiet Flows the Don*. A real discovery of a female filmmaker who's been all but forgotten, and of one of the independent spirits of early Soviet cinema.

## ASHLEY CLARK

Critic, UK

**Under the Skin** Jonathan Glazer, UK

**The Stuart Hall Project** John Akomfrah

**The Act of Killing** Joshua Oppenheimer

**An Oversimplification of Her**

**Beauty** Terence Nance, USA

**Computer Chess**

Andrew Bujalski, USA

● The single factor that unites my five picks is the element of surprise sustained. In not one case (save, broadly speaking, for John Akomfrah's masterful essay film *The Stuart Hall Project*) did I know what to expect when the lights dimmed, and in each instance I emerged feeling strongly that I'd experienced something genuinely fresh, wholly cinematic, and that I'd definitely need to see the film again as soon as possible. The unlucky ones not to make the cut are Jason Osder's beautifully crafted and profoundly disturbing archive doc *Let the Fire Burn*, Lav Diaz's mammoth *Norte, the End of History*, and Terrence Malick's *To the Wonder*. I laughed at *Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa* more than I can remember laughing at anything in the cinema for years, and I also must have had something rather large and insistent in both my eyes during the last 15 minutes of Lee Daniels's *The Butler*: a deceptively tough film that's unafraid to equate black Christian piety with rank, embedded ignorance. A personal highlight was welcoming the entertaining and mercurial Wendell B. Harris (and his dog Oppenheimer) for a Skype Q&A following an extremely rare showing of his near-forgotten African-American classic *Chameleon Street* at BFI Southbank back in February. I'd written about the film for a 'Lost & Found' column in *Sight & Sound* in October 2012 and it was great to have a hand in organising the screening. As for rep, two things stand out in particular: Mikko Niskanen's 1972, five-hour Finnish epic *Eight Deadly Shots* and the BFI's reissue of Michael Roemer's truly astonishing *Nothing but a Man*: possibly the best film about race relations in America I've ever seen. One more highlight: working on the essential, beautifully curated Film Africa festival.





**=9 Stranger by the Lake** *Painting or porn, an erotic dream or murderous nightmare, this is a film that has the hot breath of danger on the back of your neck. Like sex, like a drug... you never want it to stop.* Kong Rithdee



**=9 Norte, the End of History** *It shows that what we often think of as 'slow cinema' can be narratively involving in a very deep way. His contemporary rewrite of 'Crime and Punishment' didn't overrun by a single moment.* Jonathan Romney



**8 The Selfish Giant** *Clio Barnard brings a fresh sensibility to British Loachian social realism: this is not merely kitchen sink drama but an examination of the foul-smelling, leaky plumbing beneath.* Kate Muir, 'S&S', November 2013

#### MICHEL CIMENT

Editor, *Positif*, France

**A Touch of Sin** *Jia Zhangke, China/Japan*  
**Blue Is the Warmest Colour**

*Abdellatif Kechiche*

**Inside Llewyn Davis**

*Joel Coen & Ethan Coen*

**The 'Paradise' trilogy – Paradise: Love, Paradise: Faith, Paradise: Hope**  
**(Paradies: Liebe, Paradies: Glaube, Paradies: Hoffnung)**

*Ulrich Seidl, Austria/Germany/France*

**Venus in Fur (La Vénus à la fourrure)** *Roman Polanski, France*

● *Top of the Lake* by Jane Campion and *The Missing Picture (L'Image manquante)* by Rithy Panh: two TV masterpieces, one fiction, the other a documentary worthy of films such as *Night and Fog* (1955) and *Shoah* (1985) that blur the distinction between the small and the big screen. Other highlights: an exhibition at the Pompidou Centre in Metz dedicated to Hans Richter, a master of experimental cinema; the complete works of Eric Rohmer along with dozens of extras in a box of 30 DVDs; Pascal Mérygeau's biography of Jean Renoir; a tribute in early November at the Odéon theatre in Paris to Patrice Chéreau, who died in October: a most moving homage to a genius of opera and theatre staging who for that reason did not receive his due as a film director of such great works as *Intimacy* and *Gabrielle*. Peter Stein, Michel Piccoli, Isabelle Huppert, Jane Birkin, Charlotte Rampling, among others, read or sang.

#### MARK COUSINS

Critic and filmmaker, UK

**Under the Skin** *Jonathan Glazer*

**The Last of the Unjust**  
**(Le Dernier des injustes)**

*Claude Lanzmann, France/Austria*

**Leviathan** *Lucien Castaing-Taylor,*

*Véréna Paravel, France/UK/USA*

**Seconds of Lead (Sanye haye sorbi)** *Seyed Reza Razavi, Iran*

**Portrait of Jennie** *William Dieterle, USA*

● One of the best films I saw was Jane Campion's *Top of the Lake*, on TV. I went to more than 30 film festivals in a year and have a head full of highlights: in Edinburgh, the Iranian films; in Telluride, the restored *Portrait of Jennie*, *Under the Skin* and Buck Henry's conversation; the massive audiences and radical programming in Wrocław; the programmers in Toronto, Karlovy Vary and Kaunas; crying at films in London; and the gorgeous cinemas in Michael Moore's Traverse City festival. I saw fewer films than ever this year, because of making and showing my own. The highlights of this were: having a film in Cannes; directing a new movie with Mania Akbari; starting to work with composer David Holmes; the dreamy intensity of Telluride's 40th; Turner Classic Movies' huge film history season around *The Story of*

*Film*, Michael Moore; filming Louis Kahn buildings; the cinephilia and playfulness of Twitter; getting shown around the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague; John Sayles and Maggie Renzi; the inventiveness of distributor Film Europe; making trailers for our films (I'd happily do that forever); continuing to work with my great editor, Timo Langer; and, joy of joys, imagining new films. Each time I do the latter, I feel totally alive. The shocking low-point of my movie year was the death of director Antonia Bird.

#### NOAH COWAN

Artistic director,

TIFF Bell Lightbox, Canada

**Upstream Color** *Shane Carruth*

**Stranger by the Lake** *Alain Guiraudie*

**Blackfish** *Gabriela Cowperthwaite, USA*

**A Touch of Sin** *Jia Zhangke*

**Bastards (Les Salauds)**

*Claire Denis, France/Germany*

● Not an especially memorable year, I'm afraid...

#### HELEN DE WITT

Head of cinemas, BFI, UK

**Zero Dark Thirty** *Kathryn Bigelow, USA*

**The Selfish Giant** *Clio Barnard*

**Wadjda** *Haifaa al Mansour, Germany/*

*Saudi Arabia/USA/United Arab Emirates*

**Frances Ha**

*Noah Baumbach, USA/Brazil*

**Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer**

*Mike Lerner, UK/USA*

● A varied year, with a lot of high-quality releases, including many wonderful restorations and revivals. There were also many films with very important political content that are prescient for our times. I would have liked to have included – in no order – *Nothing but a Man*, *The Epic of Everest* (1924), *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (1964), *The Spirit of '45*, *Heaven's Gate* (1980) and *The Stuart Hall Project*.

#### MARIA DELGADO

Academic and critic, UK

**Gloria** *Sebastián Lelio, Chile/Spain*

**Story of My Death (Història de la**

**meva mort)** *Albert Serra, Spain/France*

**Wounded (La herida)**

*Fernando Franco, Spain*

**The Plague (La plaga)**

*Neus Ballús, Spain*

**Nebraska** *Alexander Payne, USA*

● I adored *Gloria* from the very first moment I saw it – how exhilarating to see the experiences of a character so often relegated to a supporting role here placed defiantly centre stage. Albert Serra is one of contemporary cinema's real mavericks and *Story of My Death* is quite unlike anything else I saw this year, embodying philosophical ideas in a layered filmic language that left me breathless with admiration. *Wounded* and *The Plague* were my two favourite





debut of the year: the former a poignant tale of a woman on the edge, directed by the editor of *Blancanieves*; the latter a creative documentary of real compassion showing a series of characters coping with the consequences of Spain's recession. *Nebraska* may have a deceptively simple storyline but it's one of those perceptive, intelligent comedies underpinned by remarkable ensemble performances that serve as a telling reminder of the absurd things that bind families together. Highlights: talking to Almodóvar about life in the hedonistic 1980s of *movida* Madrid during the UK premiere of *I'm So Excited*; observing Ventura Pons at work finalising the post-production of *Ignasi M.*; interviewing Javier Cámara while he talked in French about the challenges of performing in English – and gushed in perfect English about the acting of Benedict Cumberbatch; the delight of watching from the back of a packed cinema during the LFF as small children talked back to the screen in the closing moments of Campanella's smart take on the corporatisation of football, *Foosball* – a reminder of cinema's enduring capacity to animate, enthuse and ignite the imagination.

#### BRYONY DIXON

Curator of silent film,  
BFI National Archive, UK

#### Scherben (Shattered)

Lupu Pick, Germany, 1921

#### Rendezvous with Annie

Allan Dwan, USA, 1946

#### A Field in England Ben Wheatley

#### The Kingdom of Rye (Rågens Rike)

Ivar Johansson, Sweden, 1929

#### The Valley of the Bees (Údolí včel)

František Vlácil, Czechoslovakia, 1967

● Starting with *A Field in England* – a brave, very brave, black-and-white film experiment set during that most experimental of English epochs, the Civil War. That's where I stop with the new films and start on the newly available or rediscovered old films. Continuing the bucolic theme, a beautifully made film from Sweden called *The Kingdom of Rye* showed the maturity of Scandinavian filmmaking after the so-called 'golden age'. Another very beautiful film was *The Valley of the Bees*, a claustrophobic, slightly experimental and intense historical drama. The claustrophobic theme continued with a film I can't believe I've never seen before: *Shattered*. A German film written by the astonishing Carl Mayer and concerning the family of a railway track walker and a single event that shatters their lives. It contains one astonishing intertitle only. By complete contrast – joy of joys, a screwball I'd never seen! – *Rendezvous with Annie* by Allan Dwan is about a man who goes on an unofficial

furlough during World War II, gets his wife pregnant and returns to his small-town home a full two years later, unable to admit he is the father of his own child – too good.

#### GEOFF DYER

Writer, UK/USA

#### Captain Phillips Paul Greengrass, USA

#### A Hijacking (Kapringen)

Tobias Lindholm, Denmark

#### Gravity Alfonso Cuarón, USA

#### All Is Lost J.C. Chandor, USA

#### 12 Years a Slave

Steve McQueen, USA/UK

● I once wrote that Tom Hanks films, typically, are about him trying to get home. Looking at this list of my favourite films of 2013 I see that they're all about trying to get home. Could it be that this is what movie itself – as David Thomson calls it – is about? Well, obviously not, some are about driving cars very fast in no particular direction and some are just plain silly. In fact, it would be a mistake to assume that Robert Redford, in *All Is Lost*, really does want to get home, in the sense of back to dry land. He's already at home, trying to repair his gradually disintegrating little boat, just as I am contemplating this hastily dissolving little thesis. He wants to survive, to test himself. The less he has the more at home he feels. There's even a sense of relief and release in the way that he utters the fateful titular words, "All is lost." Coincidentally, those very same words are spoken by Chiwetel Ejiofor in *12 Years a Slave*. Hmm.

#### LESLIE FELPERIN

Hollywood Reporter, UK

#### The Congress Ari Folman,

Israel/Germany/Poland/  
Luxembourg/France/Belgium

#### Under the Skin Jonathan Glazer

#### At Berkeley Frederick Wiseman, USA

#### Frances Ha Noah Baumbach

#### Harmony Lessons (Uroki harmonii)

Emir Baigazin, Kazakhstan

Germany/France

● My list isn't really in any particular order, but my two favourites – *Under the Skin* and *The Congress* – were both deeply divisive among other

critics, which just makes me love them more. Both were outstanding examples of filmmakers taking risks with form, genre and expectations. At the time of choosing, I still haven't seen *Gravity* and I'm sure I'm going to love that too, but I expect it will have more than enough defenders. If TV shows qualified for inclusion, several films would have been knocked off this list to make room for *Breaking Bad*, *Top of the Lake* and *Orange Is the New Black*. Indeed, in terms of traditional storytelling, a lot of TV series this year were more gripping than dozens of supposedly top-notch movies, and maybe in retrospect we'll see this year as the one where the sea changed temperature.

#### PHILIP FRENCH

Critic, UK

#### Blue Jasmine Woody Allen, USA

#### A Late Quartet Yaron Zilberman, USA

#### The Place Beyond the Pines

Derek Cianfrance, USA

#### Ida Pawel Pawlikowski, Poland/Denmark

#### The Selfish Giant Clio Barnard

● The year is notable for me as an individual because I decided I would retire in August 2013 on my 80th birthday after 50 years as a professional reviewer (of films, theatre and books), most of that time spent as the *Observer's* weekly movie critic. The job has changed considerably during that time, especially over the past decade or so. But the role of the serious critic of new films remains essential, and essentially the same, in a variety of ways – as the first stage in the creation of a continuing canon, in making persuasive judgements, in placing the work being viewed in a variety of contexts, in sharing informed insights, in making larger, enlightening culture connections. Exactly how this will continue in the future and in whose hands is uncertain. There is always a form of Gresham's Law – 'bad money drives out good' – of a cultural kind at work in the arts and the public discourse. But criticism will continue, and as the editorial in the November edition of *Sight & Sound* showed, the debate is being taken seriously in the right places.

#### GRAHAM FULLER

Critic, USA

#### Beyond the Hills Cristian Mungiu

#### A Field in England Ben Wheatley

#### The Last of the Unjust

Claude Lanzmann

#### Museum Hours Jem Cohen, Austria/USA

#### Berberian Sound Studio

Peter Strickland, UK

● As the onscreen guide of the modern sequences in *The Last of the Unjust*, Claude Lanzmann is a more harrowed and sorrowful figure than the wry, laconic man who interviewed Benjamin Mummelstein in 1975 and then conducted the interviews and visited the Nazi extermination sites of *Shoah*. It is not simply that he has aged – he now bears the physical imprint of the stories of brutality, degradation and terror he has elicited. Nothing I saw this year was more indelible than the shots of him standing in the canopied courtyard and by the gallows at Theresienstadt. A current injustice is that he has still be to acknowledged as the great film artist he is. Ben Wheatley and Amy Jump's *A Field in England* struck me as the most thrillingly innovative British film of the year – not only in terms of its mixed-format distribution, but also in its uncanny blending of 17th-century superstition and folklore with a modernity of style and the contemporary demotic. As both a lament for the pity of war (encapsulated in Richard Glover's rendition of 'Baloo, My Boy') and a poignant search for friendship, it felt like a blessing. That Wheatley and Jump's Rook Films went on to produce Peter Strickland's next movie *The Duke of Burgundy* couldn't be more exciting.

#### CHARLES GANT

Heat magazine, UK

#### Her Spike Jonze, USA

#### Blue Is the Warmest Colour

Abdellatif Kechiche

#### Frances Ha Noah Baumbach

#### Starred Up David Mackenzie, UK

#### The Place Beyond the Pines

Derek Cianfrance

● I saw around 250 films in 2013. Let's hear it for the actors. Here are some performances that riveted:



*Beyond the Hills*



*Blue Jasmine*



1. Ben Mendelsohn, *Starred Up*. Following *Killing Them Softly* and *The Place Beyond the Pines*, this actor, now in his 40s, is getting braver, deeper and richer. 2. Lupita Nyong'o, *12 Years a Slave*. The deafening acclaim is wholly merited. 3. Adèle Exarchopoulos and Léa Seydoux, *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*. Abdellatif Kechiche, take note: they shared the Palme d'Or with you for a reason. 4. Barkhad Abdi, *Captain Phillips*. A great discovery by Paul Greengrass and casting director Francine Maisler. 5. Sam Rockwell, *The Way Way Back*. He makes it look easy. 6. Tom Hiddleston, *Thor: The Dark World*. This film came alive whenever Loki was on screen. 7. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, *Don Jon*. Giddily entertaining. 8. Daniil Vorobyov, *Eastern Boys*. Robin Campillo's film was my discovery of the London Film Festival. 9. James Franco, *Spring Breakers*. Dear Academy, Consider This Sh\*t. 10. Conner Chapman, Shaun Thomas, *The Selfish Giant*. Kudos to casting director Amy Hubbard, and to Clio Barnard.

#### RYAN GILBEY

New Statesman, UK

**Frances Ha** Noah Baumbach

**Gloria** Sebastián Lelio

**What Richard Did**

Lenny Abrahamson, Ireland

**Blue Is the Warmest Colour**

Abdellatif Kechiche

**Before Midnight** Richard Linklater, USA

● My film-related highlight of the year was attending a packed screening of the Sandra Bullock/Melissa McCarthy comedy *The Heat*. Cinema audiences are usually only mentioned in the context of bad behaviour – when they're talking or texting or answering their phones. But the momentum of the audience's laughter during *The Heat*, our cumulative and joyful investment in the film, was a timely reminder of what communal viewing brings to a picture. Down with online movies. Boo to videos on iPods. I could equally choose *Before Midnight* or *Philomena*, where it was palpable that everyone was struggling not to cry (or maybe that was just me). Or *Neighbouring Sounds*: at the Renouir cinema in London, we all seemed to grow increasingly attentive to the complex sound design. Our antennae were up and twitching. They can't get you for it, you know.

#### JANE GILES

Head of BFI content, UK

**The Great Beauty** Paolo Sorrentino

**The Selfish Giant** Clio Barnard

**Django Unchained** Quentin Tarantino

**Spring Breakers** Harmony Korine, USA

**Philomena**

Stephen Frears, UK/USA/France

● That's just five that I loved, with no room to mention Ginger Baker, Paul Raymond, Liberace, Mallory & Irvine... In the midst of a great year



**12 Years a Slave**

for film, my favourite event was *The Wicker Man* resurrected at the BFI Southbank in September as part of the gothic season, definitive proof that this once overlooked film is among the greatest of all British movies. John Smith winning the Jarman Award was also a terrific moment. Low points included the demise of HMV, the death of Sheila Whitaker and the passing of Lou Reed, which counts as a cinematic moment for me because the only time I ever saw him in the flesh was in a movie theatre in Toronto for the premiere of *Berlin*.

#### CARMEN GRAY

Film editor, *Dazed & Confused*, UK

**Story of My Death** Albert Serra

**The Great Beauty** Paolo Sorrentino

**Spring Breakers** Harmony Korine

**Stranger by the Lake** Alain Guiraudie

**What Now? Remind Me (E Agora?)**

**Lembra-me)** Joaquim Pinto, Portugal

● The first UK cinema release of Michael Roemer's soul-weary 1963 depiction of black life in the Deep South, *Nothing but a Man*: just beautiful. My festival highlight: discovering the European Film Festival Palic (in Serbia, close to the Hungarian border) – home to artistic integrity in programming and a sincere community atmosphere.

#### J. HOBERMAN

Critic, USA

**Gravity** Alfonso Cuarón

**Leviathan**

Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Véréna Paravel

**Computer Chess** Andrew Bujalski

**The Bling Ring**

Sofia Coppola, USA/UK/Japan/Germany

**Beyond the Hills** Cristian Mungiu

#### PAMELA HUTCHINSON

Silent London, UK

**All Is Lost** J.C. Chandor

**Beyond the Hills** Cristian Mungiu

**The Selfish Giant** Clio Barnard

**Blancanieves** Pablo Berger

**Frances Ha** Noah Baumbach

● It was an unexpected honour to be present at the premiere of an Orson Welles film at Pordenone this year, even if 'film' is perhaps too strong a word for it. A collage of scraps and retakes, *Too Much Johnson* (1938) makes for captivating, invigorating viewing, although no doubt it, and its strange rediscovery, will lead to much head-scratching among Welles scholars. That the same festival revived long-unseen Buster Keaton gags in a forgotten print of *The Blacksmith* (1922) opens up all kinds of possibilities and what-if dream scenarios. It was disappointing, if not surprising, that Pablo Berger's gorgeous *Blancanieves* failed to make the headline-grabbing impact of a certain other European modern silent. It was gladdening, though, to see J.C. Chandor's hefty, dialogue-free *All Is Lost* demonstrating the legacy of silent cinema in a completely different form. And at the very beginning of the year, the rerelease of Anthony Asquith's *Underground* (1928), with its masterful new score by Neil Brand, showed that the real deal – a 1920s British silent rather than a modern imitation – could sell cinema tickets even at this late date. As I type, two very different 1920s silents (*The Epic of Everest* and 1922's *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*) are also on release.

#### NICK JAMES

Editor, *Sight & Sound*, UK

**The Great Beauty** Paolo Sorrentino

**Ida** Pawel Pawlikowski

**Stray Dogs (Jiao you)**

Tsai Ming-liang, France/Taiwan

**Upstream Color** Shane Carruth

**Zero Dark Thirty** Kathryn Bigelow

● This year dazzled in its range of remarkable and/or pertinent films. I've picked those that shook the senses and sensibilities most. Paolo Sorrentino's yen for the high-culture gesture can sometimes grate but the wit and panache of *The Great Beauty* outclasses even *Il divo* (2008). Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida* vaunts a quieter perfectionism. If I say it's like a Béla Tarr film slightly sped up I'm doing neither director a favour, but it's the only shorthand that fits its heartfelt eloquence about Polish history and its consequences. I've picked *Stray Dogs* because I've never been so transfixed by a sequence of images. *Upstream Colour* really stands for three films – I tie it together with Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* and Spike Jonze's *Her* – all of which represent fresh kinds of cinema about the way we live and think now. Shane Carruth's film has many troubling, morbid insights. I need to see Glazer's film again but I have the feeling it's a future classic about empathy as a virus. *Her* I've only just seen, think is tremendous, but want to hold back for next year's poll. Kathryn Bigelow's profoundly misunderstood *Zero Dark Thirty* will not get many votes elsewhere but I've seen no more intelligent film on the West's struggle with al-Qaeda, and if Bigelow made a tactical mistake in thinking she could show 'how it was' from the CIA point of view and not get pilloried, she nonetheless made the pathetic charade of *Homeland* impossible to watch. In a very strong year for documentary, I prefer Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture* for emotional impact and Alex Gibney's *We Steal Secrets: The Story of WikiLeaks* for insight over everyone else's favourite, *The Act of Killing*, which I thought was far too interested in spectacle and not enough in investigation. I can't quite believe Clio Barnard's magnificent *The Selfish Giant* didn't make my list. Few films have given me more pleasure than *Frances Ha* and *Wadjda*. Perhaps *12 Years a Slave* and *Django Unchained* presented such a strong contrast that each weakened the other as a prospect, and the same perhaps applies to *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* and *Stranger by the Lake*. I deeply admire all of these films and want to say a word, too, for the distinctly adult pleasures of *Nebraska*, *A Late Quartet*, *Gloria* and *Norte, The End of History*. What a year!

#### KENT JONES

Film Society of Lincoln Center, USA

**Spring/Song** Nathaniel Dorsky, USA

**Nebraska** Alexander Payne

**The Last of the Unjust**

Claude Lanzmann

**The End of Time**

Peter Mettler, Switzerland/Canada

**The Wind Rises (Kaze tachinu)**

Hayao Miyazaki, Japan





**DANNY LEIGH**

Novelist, broadcaster, UK

**I Wish (Kiseki)** Hirokazu Koreeda, Japan  
**The Act of Killing** Joshua Oppenheimer  
**Only God Forgives** Nicolas Winding Refn  
**Gravity** Alfonso Cuarón

**Spring Breakers** Harmony Korine  
 ● I look at these five films and see a faultline down the middle of them, a polarity, completely accidental. Vivid, luminous nihilism smashes into heartfelt humanism (and vice versa) like a Toho monster clash. It's tempting to read something profound into that, I suppose, a simple list of much-liked films a microcosm of how 2013 seemed the latest stage in an ongoing rupture, but maybe on another day things might have looked sunnier. Or had I mustered the nerve to include *The Counsellor*, the nihilists would have walked it.

**ROGER LUCKHURST**

Academic, UK

**Upstream Color** Shane Carruth  
**Neighbouring Sounds (O som ao redor)** Kleber Mendonça Filho, Brazil  
**At Berkeley** Frederick Wiseman  
**A Spell to Ward off the Darkness** Ben Rivers & Ben Russell, France/Estonia  
**The Act of Killing** Joshua Oppenheimer

● Five films to make the jaw drop. Shane Carruth's enigmatic sci-fi developed an extraordinary associative logic that left you unpicking the connections for days. Filho's *Neighbouring Sounds* offered menace and an oblique take on inequality in Brazil, a documentary style lanced with instants of stunning visual violence. The film is a rewrite of Haneke's *Hidden (Caché)*, but way, way better. Wiseman's four-hour documentary on a great public university in crisis was slightly too close to the bone for this academic reviewer, but should be compulsory viewing for all senior management teams everywhere. Watching a nerd trying to train a robot to fold a towel is also curiously compelling. Ben Rivers and Ben Russell's collaboration, *A Spell to Ward off Darkness*, was as much to be endured as enjoyed (beware, it ends with 30 minutes of a black metal concert), but I thought contained some stunning images and absorbing reflections on utopian possibility. The spell is cinema itself, and Rivers continues his impressive alchemical reflections on the form here. Astonishment can't quite cover the response to the footage of atrocities restaged by the very Indonesian death squads who had first committed them decades ago in *The Act of Killing*. The status of Joshua Oppenheimer's images continues to perplex and confound me months later. The horror of recognition

**Django Unchained**

that comes at the end of the film – an incredible bodily response of one of the perpetrators – is all the worse for knowing it can probably only be temporary. Meanwhile, hats off to the BFI for its excellent 'Gothic' season this autumn, from Maya Deren to Lucio Fulci, and all points in between.

**DEREK MALCOLM**

London Evening Standard, UK

**The Great Beauty** Paolo Sorrentino  
**Blue Is the Warmest Colour** Abdellatif Kechiche  
**Child's Pose** Călin Peter Netzer  
**Norte, the End of History (Norte, hangganan ng kasaysayan)** Lav Diaz, Philippines

**Home from Home: Chronicle of a Vision (Die andere Heimat – Chronik einer Sehnsucht)** Edgar Reitz, Germany/France

● You can see Edgar Reitz's *Home from Home: Chronicle of a Vision* without reference to *Heimat* 1, 2 and 3. It is very long and almost as good as Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009). I would not have bet on the veteran director pulling it off, but he does. Even longer is the Filipino *Norte*, which examines the country's murky past and the essential nature of evil versus inherent goodness. Both are extraordinary, as is Sorrentino's Roman fresco *The Great Beauty*, magnificently shot and acted. They say it is souped-up Fellini with a dash of Antonioni – not bad models, however. One has to include *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, the Cannes winner, despite the sniping between actors and director. It too is shot and acted superbly. *Child's Pose* is yet another example of the new Romanian cinema's capacity to put what looks very like the truth on the screen with sophistication and passion – virtues that don't always go together. A good year? Not so sure, but these films will certainly live.

**ADRIAN MARTIN**

Academic, Australia/Germany

**Jealousy (La Jalousie)** Philippe Garrel, France  
**Passion** Brian De Palma, France/Germany  
**You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet (Vous n'avez encore rien vu)** Alain Resnais, France/Germany  
**Detention** Joseph Kahn, USA  
**Stray Dogs** Tsai Ming-liang

● At FICUNAM in Mexico: *Summer (L'Été)*, 1969 by Marcel Hanoun, and the restored *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991) by Edward Yang. On TV: 'Ozymandias', the third-last episode of *Breaking Bad*; and *Top of the Lake*, Jane Campion's best work ever. In Frankfurt's Deutsches Filmmuseum: *Playing (Jogo de cena)*, 2007 by Eduardo Coutinho. Discovered on DVD: Ernst Lubitsch's *Angel* (1937) and Fritz Lang's *Clash by Night* (1952). Most overrated film of the year: *Leviathan*. Worst films of the year: *The Great Gatsby*, *Spring Breakers*, *Only God Forgives*.

**SOPHIE MAYER**

Critic and academic, UK

**Stories We Tell** Sarah Polley, Canada  
**Salma** Kim Longinotto, UK/India  
**The Stuart Hall Project** John Akomfrah  
**One Mile Away** Penny Woolcock, UK  
**Top of the Lake** Jane Campion, Australia/New Zealand/UK

● Shirley Clarke's *Ornette: Made in America*, screened at Ambulante in Morelia, Mexico, was my festival highlight, and the wildest documentary of the year. It shared a visionary commitment to black culture, learning and utopian politics (as well as experimental form) with John Akomfrah's second archival documentary. Stuart Hall appears as a harbinger of an imagined utopian future that has not yet been achieved, but which he brought closer through state-funded cultural projects for which this film – drawing on BBC, BFI and OU archives – also stands as epitaph. Here lies our public sphere – although Penny Woolcock's raw and ready *One Mile Away*, bringing together MPs, social enterprise and crowd-funding, bespeaks the resourcefulness of the disenfranchised margins of British cinema and citizens. The NFB-funded *Stories We Tell* offers a different oblique history, an intimate epic about the generosity of both documentary and family as narrative forms; likewise Kim Longinotto's searing *Salma*, a living portrait of pioneering Tamil poet and politician Rajathi

Salma. Both offer rich findings from the archive of feelings and explore the documentation of the unconscious, the sensual, the dreamt, the complex and the ambiguous, which the wonderful *Future My Love* and *Museum Hours*, too, explored. While *The East* and *Night Moves* both engaged and intrigued with the formulation of a new American indie eco-cinema, and *Wadjda* and *The Sessions* lifted my heart in different ways with hope for a more diverse film culture, the only fiction as essential as the docs above was Jane Campion's six-hour *Top of the Lake* (part-funded by the BBC). Sustained yet minutely detailed in gesture, edit and image, performed with ferocity, it was simultaneously epic and tragic. No theatrical release came close.

**DANIELA MICHEL**

Director, Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia, Mexico

**Django Unchained** Quentin Tarantino  
**La Maison de la radio** Nicolas Philibert  
**Heli** Amat Escalante, Mexico/  
 Germany/Netherlands/France  
**Gravity** Alfonso Cuarón  
**Ida** Pawel Pawlikowski

● Highlights included attending the 40th Telluride Film Festival, especially the screening at the Werner Herzog Theater where Alejandro Ramírez, president of the Morelia Film Festival, received the Special Medallion; and attending the fifth Lumière Film Festival in Lyons, where I had the privilege of seeing Claude Lelouch's *Le Voyou* (1970) presented by Quentin Tarantino.

**KATE MUIR**

The Times, UK

**12 Years a Slave** Steve McQueen  
**The Selfish Giant** Clio Barnard  
**A Touch of Sin** Jia Zhangke  
**The Act of Killing** Joshua Oppenheimer  
**Upstream Color** Shane Carruth

● One of the other delights of 2013 was Haifaa al Mansour's *Wadjda*, the first film from Saudi Arabia, directed by a woman, and starring an 11-year-old girl and her green bike. From a land where cinemas are illegal...

**KIM NEWMAN**

Novelist and critic, UK

**The Lone Ranger** Gore Verbinski, USA  
**Only God Forgives** Nicolas Winding Refn  
**The Act of Killing** Joshua Oppenheimer  
**Cheap Thrills** E.L. Katz, USA  
**Upstream Color** Shane Carruth

● ...just new stuff that's stayed with me.

**ANDRÉA PICARD**

Film curator, Toronto International Film Festival, Canada

**A Thousand Suns (Mille soleils)** Mati Diop, France  
**A Touch of Sin** Jia Zhangke  
**Norte, the End of History** Lav Diaz  
**Story of My Death** Albert Serra



**The Strange Little Cat**  
(*Das merkwürdige Kätzchen*)

Ramon Zürcher, Germany

● A year bathed in surprise: Mati Diop's 45-minute film that reminds us that cinema remains inscribed on the body, as much as in memory; Jia's astonishing *wuxia* update, which indicts with every kick and splash of red; Lav Diaz's colourful, widescreen epic melodrama; Albert Serra's timeless encounter hovering between legend and reality; Ramon Zürcher as a major new talent to watch; Alain Guiraudie rising through the ranks at long last, etc. Other films that made a lasting impression include Guiraudie's *Stranger by the Lake*, Tsai Ming-liang's *Stray Dogs*, Stephanie Spray and Pacho Velez's *Manakamana*, Joaquim Pinto's *What Now? Remind Me*, Robert Beavers's *Listening to the Space in My Room* and Shambhavi Kaul's *Mount Song*.

**JAMES QUANDT**

Critic and senior programmer,  
TIFF Cinematheque, Canada

**Norte, the End of History** *Lav Diaz*  
**'Til Madness Do Us Part** (*Feng ai*)

Wang Bing, Japan/France/Hong Kong

**Three Exercises of Interpretation**  
(*Trois exercices d'interprétation*)

Cristi Puiu, France

**What Now? Remind Me** *Joaquim Pinto*  
**The King's Body**

João Pedro Rodrigues, Portugal

● Is digital exacerbating or abetting the tendency to over-length (or has shooting ratio lost its meaning)?

**NAMAN RAMACHANDRAN**

Critic, UK/India

**The Great Beauty** *Paolo Sorrentino*

**Breathe In** *Drake Doremus, USA*

**Gravity** *Alfonso Cuarón*

**Ugly** *Anurag Kashyap, India*

**Lucia** *Pawan Kumar, India*

● You leave *The Great Beauty* with the realisation that you have just been in the presence of greatness, but the film doesn't leave you. The process of decay has never been captured better and Tony Servillo's central performance is one for the ages. *Breathe In*: Drake Doremus takes the central conceit of *Boudou Saved from Drowning* (1932) – that of a stranger shaking a happy family to its core – and transports it to small-town USA and imbues it with a tension, both erotic and dramatic, that makes for masterful cinema. *Gravity*: in these days of flash sci-fi movies where everything happens easily at the touch of a button or the display of a superpower, *Gravity* shows us that reality is all about nuts and bolts, and also inspires the kind of space awe not seen since 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. *Ugly*: Anurag Kashyap's uncompromising film takes no prisoners, has only one sympathetic character – who is not on screen for most of the film – and leaves us with the sobering thought

that in modern Mumbai, there is no space for love, only money. *Lucia*: this little crowdfunded Kannada film has a great concept about lucid dreaming and a killer twist that even the most experienced film critic won't see coming. Audiences in India and London embraced this unusual film, which should in an ideal world be snapped up for a Hollywood remake. The highlight of the year was to watch *Life of Pi* star Irrfan Khan in conversation with his *The Warrior* director Asif Kapadia at the BFI Southbank as part of the London Indian Film Festival and get an insight into India's finest actor's process. The icing on the cake that rocked the normally staid venue was when, during the Q&A, a fan asked Irrfan to give his wife a hug. Irrfan obliged, much to the delight of the audience, and then had them in splits when he asked the husband if he regularly asked strange men to hug his wife!

**TONY RAYNS**

Critic, UK

**Anatomy of a Paperclip** (*Yamamori clip koujou no atari*) *Ikeda Akira, Japan*  
**A Field in England** *Ben Wheatley*

**Manuscripts Don't Burn**

(*Dast-neveshtehaa nemisoozand*)

Mohammad Rasoulof, Iran

**Snowpiercer** *Bong Joon-ho/*

*South Korea/USA/France*

**A Touch of Sin** *Jia Zhangke*

● The list is in alphabetical order, not order of merit or interest. If I could have a sixth, it would be another Iranian film, the Venice *Orrizonte* prizewinner *Fish & Cat*, which comprises one 131-minute take and delicately explores the resonances of a shocking 1998 news story. My five choices represent five of the relatively few occasions this year when a film had a palpable impact on me. *Anatomy of a Paperclip* is the most interesting Japanese indie of the year, a Lynchian (or maybe just absurdist) rethink of a Japanese folk tale. I recommended it to the London Film Festival, but they rejected it as "hard to follow".

**KONG RITHDEE**

*The Bangkok Post*, Thailand

**Stranger by the Lake** *Alain Guiraudie*

**Norte, the End of History** *Lav Diaz*

**The Missing Picture**

Rithy Panh, Cambodia/France

**The Act of Killing** *Joshua Oppenheimer*

**The Grandmaster** (*Yi dai zong shi*)

Wong Kar-Wai, Hong Kong/China

● 1) *Stranger by the Lake*: painting or porn, an erotic dream or murderous nightmare, this is a film that has a hot breath of danger on the back of your neck. Like sex, like a drug, or like a visitation of death, you never want it to stop. 2) *Norte*: dense like literature and deeply rooted in the cave of cinema, Diaz's film gives us the best and the worst of humanity. 3) *The*



**6 Upstream Color** *A film to make the jaw drop. 'Primer' director Shane Carruth's enigmatic sci-fi developed an extraordinary associative logic that left you unpicking the connections for days.* Roger Luckhurst



**6 A Touch of Sin** *Blending his usual documentary aptitude with a newfound flair for bloodletting, Jia has made a well-engineered satire that enjoys its violent displays while hitting its political targets.* Nick James, 'S&S', July 2013



**5 Frances Ha** *Serves up its wit and wisdom with a generous measure of the pleasure principle... the writing ensures the movie always knows where it's going even if the same can't be said for its protagonist.* Trevor Johnston, 'S&S', August 2013





**4 The Great Beauty** *My absolute favourite of the year, a film that consolidated Sorrentino's status as the boldest of contemporary auteurs – and reminded the world that there was such a thing as cinematic euphoria.* Jonathan Romney



**3 Blue Is the Warmest Colour** *The faster you discard allegations of sexism in the portrayal of beautiful lesbian sex, the better. There are few films that dig so deeply into the complexities of human relations.* Fernanda Solórzano



**2 Gravity** *Alfonso Cuarón thinks through every sequence, shot and screen instant in terms of spectacular visuals and culture-crossing, easily graspable metaphor. The action is as symbolic as it is dazzling.* Matt Zoller Seitz



**Missing Picture:** Rithy Panh's film pays tribute to and questions the power of images – those that can be shown and those that cannot, those that should be seen and those that should not, those that are lost and those that are found, those that are touchable and those that are invisible, those that are ethically dubious and those that are movingly, irredeemably personal. 4) *The Act of Killing*: in South-east Asia, as in other places, dictators appoint rats and cockroaches as their executors, and they live to tell their tales. This experimental documentary is a horror show, a dagger, a guillotine, a confession box in an insane asylum. It's also a very frightening lesson on history and how we remember it. 5) *The Grandmaster*: kung fu as cubist dreams, as unrequited romance, as ungraspable longings and indelible memories.

#### TIM ROBEY

*The Daily Telegraph, UK*

**12 Years a Slave** Steve McQueen

**Norte, the End of History** Lav Diaz

**Under the Skin** Jonathan Glazer

**A Hijacking** Tobias Lindholm

**Frances Ha** Noah Baumbach

● Beyond these five films, some galvanising performances: Paulina García's immensely charismatic, noble mess of a Chilean divorcee in *Gloria*; Matthew McConaughey and Jared Leto, forging the year's least expected straight-gay Aids bromance in *Dallas Buyers Club*; Julia Roberts, back to something like her *Brockovich* best as the testy, exhausted, still-up-for-a-fight eldest daughter in *August: Osage County*; Johan Heldenbergh and particularly Veerle Baetens in the bluegrass-infused Flemish drama *The Broken Circle Breakdown*; Michael Douglas's Liberace in *Behind the Candelabra*, both hilarious and tragic, and the equally good Matt Damon as Scott Thorson. From the top five, Søren Malling's brave-faced boardroom negotiator in *A Hijacking* and Greta Gerwig's lovably unfinished person in *Frances Ha* take some beating, but the absolute acting highlight of the year has to be the slow-burn rage and disbelief of a peerless Chiwetel Ejiofor.

#### JONATHAN ROMNEY

*Critic, UK*

**The Great Beauty** Paolo Sorrentino

**Upstream Color** Shane Carruth

**Norte, the End of History** Lav Diaz

**Camille Claudel 1915**

Bruno Dumont, France

**Inside Llewyn Davis**

Joel Coen & Ethan Coen

● *The Great Beauty* was my absolute favourite of the year, a film that consolidated Paolo Sorrentino's status as the boldest of contemporary auteurs – and reminded the world that there was such a thing as genuine cinematic euphoria. *Upstream Color*

and Lav Diaz's four-hour *Norte* (a mere fragment by his usually epic standards) were dazzling and very different reinventions of the art of cinematic storytelling. *Norte* showed that what we often think of – or write off – as 'slow cinema' can be narratively involving in a very deep way, and his highly political contemporary rewrite of *Crime and Punishment* didn't overrun by a single moment (not that the last eight-hour film I saw of his did, either). Among the films that would have made it if this had been a top ten, I certainly would have included *Spring Breakers* for its sheer brassychutzpah. I've been a Harmony Korine agnostic in the past, but found this film totally electrifying in the way it offered a throwaway pop-trash gesture as conceptual art, and/or vice versa; not that I like the 'X meets Y' formula, but dare I say: Roger Corman meets Jeff Koons? Highlights of my year included serving as juror for the LUX Prize, which involved seeing a huge amount of European film, and catching up with the astonishing *The Last Time I Saw Macao*; and rediscovering British film (or certain British films, not least Losey's *The Servant*) for a fortnight I spent in Sarajevo teaching at Béla Tarr's new Film Factory. Watch this establishment, and its international student body. Oh yes, and at long last getting to make another short film myself, entitled *L'Assenza* and, yes I admit, owing a certain amount to certain moments of Antonioni. (I even managed to learn some Italian in the process.)

#### JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

*Critic, USA*

**Anything Else: A Portrait of Tommy**

Thompson From 'Two Portraits',

Peter Thompson, USA, 1982

**Man Made Place** (Ren Zao Kong Jian)

Yushen Su, Taiwan/Germany

**Kill Your Darlings** John Krokidas, USA

**Double Play: James Benning**

and Richard Linklater

Gabe Klinger, France/Portugal/USA

**A Fuller Life** Samantha Fuller, USA

● Not my five favourite films of 2013, but five first films that I especially like, all but one of which qualifies as non-fiction. The late Peter Thompson's 15-minute *Anything Else*, an indelible portrait of his father, was actually made in 1982, but its recent appearance on the DVD box-set *6 Cinematic Essays* is for me the major film event of the year. I saw Yushen Su's 53-minute *Man Made Place* at the Message to Man festival in St Petersburg – a frightening yet awesomely beautiful documentary about a futuristic city being built and advertised in Yumen (in China's Gansu Province), made by a filmmaker born in Taiwan and currently living in Germany. *Kill Your Darlings* is a first



feature by John Krokidas about how Allen Ginsberg got expelled from Columbia University – actually a sensitive and resourceful illustration of what it meant to be gay, white and almost hip in Manhattan in the 40s. And finally, two personal films about personal filmmakers, Samantha Fuller's loving re-enactments and evocations of her old man (Sam), assisted by several friends and family props, *A Fuller Life*; and Gabe Klinger's *Double Play: James Benning and Richard Linklater*, an Austin reunion of two friends that warmly teaches us useful things about both filmmakers.

#### SUKHDEV SANDHU

Critic, USA/UK

##### Taskafa, Stories of the Street

Andrea Luka Zimmerman, Turkey

Here Be Dragons Mark Cousins, UK

How We Used to Live Paul Kelly, UK

From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf

Shaina Anand & Ashok Sukumaran, India/United Arab Emirates

Your Day Is My Night Lynne Sachs, USA

#### MATT ZOLLER SEITZ

Critic, Rogerebert.com, USA

The Act of Killing Joshua Oppenheimer

Fruitvale Station Ryan Coogler, USA

To the Wonder Terrence Malick, USA

Gravity Alfonso Cuarón

The Spectacular Now James Ponsoldt

● Seeing *The Act of Killing* was one of the most profound filmgoing experiences of my life. The movie's last 15 minutes are so strange and searing and revelatory that the word 'filmmaking' doesn't capture them. What's on screen is more like some unholy combination of therapy and sorcery. Much has been written about the importance of *Fruitvale Station*'s subject matter at a time when the US is grappling with the most intense and open racial strife since the 1960s, but it is important for another reason: because it reclaims neorealist filmmaking for American independent cinema. When's the last time you saw an American movie with this much mundane daily life in it, depicted so perceptively, and with such a sense of joy? Terrence Malick's much-derided creative decisions in *To the Wonder* (which include forgoing almost all dialogue in favour of narration, and directing his actors like dancers) make this one of the loveliest experimental films released to theatres since, well, probably *The Tree of Life*. The backlash against Alfonso Cuarón's astonishing space adventure *Gravity* began, predictably, within days of its release; many critics used the taciturn, male-centred *All Is Lost* as a cudgel with which to beat it about the head and shoulders for being 'sentimental' and for telling rather than showing. Yes, it tells, in an old-movie way that seems clunky if you think what's fashionable is also what's evolved.



Inside Llewyn Davis

But the movie also *shows*, brilliantly, and the tale is pitched – daringly – at the level of an early Spielberg movie, or a late-period silent picture. Cuarón thinks through every sequence, shot and screen instant in terms of spectacular visuals and culture-crossing, easily graspable metaphor. It is about emotional regeneration as much as physical survival; the action is as symbolic as it is dazzling. In *The Spectacular Now* Miles Teller and Shailene Woodley may be the screen couple of the year, but despite what you might have heard, this isn't a teen romance. It's more about the overwhelming psychic damage inflicted by one's childhood. Few films about characters in any age range are this honest and true.

#### PAUL JULIAN SMITH

Academic, USA

Gravity Alfonso Cuarón

Lincoln Steven Spielberg, USA

Gloria Sebastián Lelio

Wolf at the Door (O lobo atrás da porta) Fernando Coimbra, Brazil

Club Sandwich

Fernando Eimbcke, Mexico

● *Gravity*: because it remakes the long take for a new cinema of attractions; *Lincoln*: because it finds moving drama in deadly dull bureaucracy; *Gloria*: because it takes sex seriously for the middle-aged; *Wolf at the Door*: because it fuses taut criminal investigation with shattering psychological drama; *Club Sandwich*: because you can never go home again.

#### FERNANDA SOLORZANO

Letras Libres magazine, Mexico

Blue Is the Warmest Colour

Abdellatif Kechiche

Heli Amat Escalante

Gloria Sebastián Lelio

Canibal Manuel Martín Cuenca, Spain/Romania/Russia/France

All Is Lost J.C. Chandor

● *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*: the faster you discard allegations of sexism in the portrayal of beautiful lesbian sex, the better. There are few films I can recall that dig so deeply (and with



Blancanieves

such intimacy) into the complexities of human relations, the joys and pains of self-discovery and the hurtful realisation that our bodies and minds can desire opposing things. *Heli*: in his most observant, restrained and powerful film, Escalante tells a story based on atmosphere and mood, exploring the uncertainty of living in an unruly country where even law enforcers have lost their moral compass. Its portrayal of atrocities frequently committed in Mexico borders the surreal: that's exactly the point. *Gloria*: so many films about middle-aged women's empowerment, yet so few have the guts to put their characters in embarrassing – even pathetic – situations. Wonderful actress Paulina García lends her character a truthfulness absent in Hollywood fables of the kind, which tend to be sentimental, epic and far-fetched. The uplifting conclusion is not indulgent but hard-earned. *Canibal*: deliberately anti-slasher, Cuenca's tale about a tailor (who happens to eat human flesh) is reminiscent of Buñuel. *All Is Lost*: among the recent crop of films about stranded human beings, Chandor's fill-in-the-blanks tale is the best portrayal of the fallacies of an era of hyper-communication. Key to the sobering message is Robert Redford's top-notch performance as a self-assured man who gradually loses hope.

#### KATE STABLES

Critic, UK

Lincoln Steven Spielberg

Gravity Alfonso Cuarón

Wadjda Haifaa al Mansour

Blue Is the Warmest Colour

Abdellatif Kechiche

The Great Beauty Paolo Sorrentino

#### MATTHEW SWEET

BBC broadcaster, UK

Blancanieves Pablo Berger

Gravity Alfonso Cuarón

We Went to War Michael Grigsby, UK

For Those in Peril Paul Wright, UK

Behind the Candelabra

Steven Soderbergh, USA

● Marvellous to see a new silent film that had a proper understanding of the form – pity this won't have the success enjoyed by *The Artist* (2011)... Awful that we lost our great documentarist Michael Grigsby this year. His last film, though, is a great one.

#### AMY TAUBIN

Critic, USA

A Touch of Sin Jia Zhangke

Spring Breakers Harmony Korine

Outtakes from the Life of a

Happy Man Jonas Mekas, USA

Computer Chess Andrew Bujalski

Bastards Claire Denis

● Such an excellent year that a list of five won't do. Two documentaries – *The Last of the Unjust* and *The Square* – deserve to be included, as does the made-for-TV *Behind the Candelabra*. But in New York, the great event of the year and likely the decade and on, was the complete retrospective of the moving image work of Jean-Luc Godard organised by Kent Jones and Jake Perlin. Titled 'The Spirit of the Forms', it spun out from the New York Film Festival for three glorious weeks and proved that even in his delusional Maoist period Godard never stopped reinventing cinema in every movie. For me the revelations were the films I had once argued against: *Hail Mary* (1985) and *Nouvelle Vague* (1990) – now magnificent to behold.

#### DAVID THOMPSON

Critic and documentarist, UK

The 'Paradise' trilogy Ulrich Seidl

The Act of Killing Joshua Oppenheimer

Blancanieves Pablo Berger

Neighbouring Sounds

Kleber Mendonça Filho

Exhibition Joanna Hogg, UK

● My selection – in no particular order – is based on films that seemed to me above all to break new ground aesthetically. But I also greatly enjoyed *The Great Beauty*, *Snowpiercer*, *The Immigrant*, *Stranger by the Lake*, *Gravity* and *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*. *Blue Jasmine* and *Django Unchained* restored my faith in two filmmakers I'd almost given up on. Events





➔ I found inspiring include *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) with full orchestra at the Barbican in London and Ozu's *Walk Cheerfully* (1930) with *benshi*—explainers—at the South Bank. Key retrospectives were the restorations of Borowczyk at the Wrocław festival (warmly received by a young audience) and the (almost) complete Chris Marker at the Pompidou Centre. I also found very moving the Pasolini/Rome exhibition at the Cinémathèque Française—here was a man who never failed to speak his mind and pursue his own path in cinema, whatever the consequences. The same venue also screened a beautiful print of Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem* (1970), a film richly deserving of a new life. I'm happy that DVDs and Blu-rays continue to uncover lost treasures, such as the BBC play *Robin Redbreast* (BFI), which has haunted me for decades.

#### GINETTE VINCEDEAU

Academic, UK

##### Abuse of Weakness

(*Abus de faiblesse*) Catherine Breillat, France/Germany/Belgium  
**Hannah Arendt** Margarethe von Trotta, Germany/Luxembourg/France/Israel

##### Blue Is the Warmest Colour

Abdellatif Kechiche  
**Frances Ha** Noah Baumbach  
**The Past (Le Passé)**

Asghar Farhadi, Iran

● This year included some strong films and picking five, as ever, was difficult—others for me included *The Nun* (La Religieuse), *Jimmy P.* and *Gare du Nord*. Without planning it, my selection seems to split between fascinating, complex and sympathetic portrayals of women (*Abuse of Weakness*, *Hannah Arendt* and *Frances Ha*) and films that, while extraordinary in other ways, are not devoid of misogyny (*The Past*, *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*). But none of these matched the joy of revisiting the films of Jean Grémillon at the BFI retrospective in London.

#### THIRZA WAKEFIELD

Critic, UK

**Gloria** Sebastián Lelio

##### It's Such a Beautiful Day

Don Hertzfeldt, USA

##### Before Midnight

Richard Linklater  
**The Selfish Giant** Clio Barnard

##### Stranger by the Lake

Alain Guiraudie  
 ● The film that had me most excited and most excitable on leaving the cinema was Sebastián Lelio's *Gloria*. For me, *Gloria* was far and away the most compelling, complex and finished character of the year. Lelio's regard for this woman, modelled on his mother's generation, and all women by extension, is unostentatious in its admiration. Coming in at a close second was seeing *It's Such a Beautiful Day* at the ICA. Hertzfeldt's line-drawing feature

animation refuses the viewer even a moment's relaxation, as it impresses with its kinetic visuals and insight into a volatile stickman mind. In thrall to its melancholy purgatory, I could not have foreseen the film's final escalate into unabashedly transcendental ecstasy. Other highlights: the restored *Scarecrow* (1973) at the BFI; Nicolas Roeg's memoirs, *The World Is Ever Changing*; Woody Allen's returning to female anguish with *Blue Jasmine*; performances by Chiwetel Ejiofor in *12 Years a Slave*, and Adèle Exarchopoulos and Léa Seydoux in *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*; *Night of Silence (Lal gece)*—a great film, that should have seen a wider release; and FrightFest 2013.

#### CATHERINE WHEATLEY

Critic and academic, UK

##### What Richard Did

Lenny Abrahamson

##### Stories We Tell

Sarah Polley

##### Blue Jasmine

Woody Allen

##### The Selfish Giant

Clio Barnard

##### The 'Paradise' trilogy

Ulrich Seidl

● My cinematic highlight of 2013 was taking my four-week-old daughter to her first theatrical release (my local runs a parent-and-baby film club). Clio Barnard's *The Selfish Giant* was an auspicious beginning to what I hope will be a happy lifetime of film viewing for my daughter (and film viewing in cinemas, at that).

#### ARMOND WHITE

Critic, CityArts, USA

##### Dormant Beauty

(*Bella addormentata*)

Marco Bellocchio, Italy/France

##### Pain & Gain

Michael Bay, USA

##### Man of Steel

Zack Snyder, USA/Canada/UK

##### The We and the I

Michel Gondry, UK/USA/France

##### Byzantium

Neil Jordan, Ireland/UK/USA

● Marco Bellocchio has proved himself extraordinary. His recent career comeback is distinguished by films (*Vincere*) that honestly explore the confusion of contemporary political and spiritual complexity. *Dormant Beauty* is fresh, funny and revelatory, unlike the drawn-out clichés of Sorrentino's bogus, boring, sub-Fellini imitation in *The Great Beauty*. Bellocchio's moral and spiritual complexity match Zack Snyder's sophistication in *Man of Steel*, a stirring masterpiece rejected only by childish comic fans afraid of Snyder's graphic power and its emotional correlative. Michael Bay's artistry is undeniable in the funny, striking *Pain & Gain*—an American exposé of global greed. Michel Gondry's *The We and the I* finds depth in adolescent maturation and Neil Jordan explores British sexual-spiritual history in *Byzantium*, the most adult vampire/feminist film ever made. Special mention to three great comebacks: Walter Hill's *Bullet to the Head*, Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *The Gardener* and Eytan Fox's *Yossi*—films that remind us the best movies are also humanist gestures.

#### NEIL YOUNG

Critic, UK

##### Aningaaq

Jonás Cuarón, USA

##### The Act of Killing

Joshua Oppenheimer

##### Greenland Unrealsed

Dania Raymond, France/Taiwan

##### Stray Dogs

Tsai Ming-liang

##### Frances Ha

Noah Baumbach

● A nicely freakish year, with two unconnected Greenland-related shorts making the cut. The subtly heartbreaking, intimately spectacular *Aningaaq* is Jonás Cuarón's seven-minute companion-piece to *Gravity*, the feature he co-wrote with his father Alfonso, showing us the 'other' side of astronaut Sandra Bullock's radio chat with an Inuit fisherman. *Gravity*

is one of 2013's finest features, but little *Aningaaq*, pound for pound, nevertheless packs a much greater punch. *Greenland Unrealsed*, which debuted as part of an installation in 2012 and then surfaced on the big screen at FID Marseille in July 2013, is Dania Raymond's infectiously joyous nine-minute computer-animated homage to Michelangelo Antonioni. Taiwan itself provides the subject and backdrop for the year's towering cinematic achievement, *Stray Dogs*. Tsai's cumulatively overwhelming vision of urban poverty is reportedly the Malaysia-born master's farewell to the artform. An ostensibly dismaying prospect, if accurate, but on reflection perhaps not an entirely inappropriate one. Tsai—on the evidence of *Stray Dogs* in general and its final shot in particular—may have taken cinema about as far as it can currently go. Now he belongs to the ages.

#### ROB YOUNG

Critic, Norway/UK

##### A Field in England

Ben Wheatley

##### Blancanieves

Pablo Berger

##### The Wicker Man: The Final Cut

Robin Hardy, UK

##### Gravity

Alfonso Cuarón

##### The Great Beauty

Paolo Sorrentino

● In 2013 the idea of British 'folk horror' really began to acquire a lustre it's never enjoyed previously. The BFI's monumental 'Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film' season also spawned a raft of creepy DVD reissues, from *Dead of Night* and *Robin Redbreast* to the incomparable *Schalken the Painter*, that exemplify an uncanny televisual eye that belongs only to Albion's film makers. Fascinating, then, to see Ben Wheatley absorbing these traits, with equal doses of black humour and nihilism, in *Sightseers* and *A Field in England*, a lysergic pilgrim's progress that picks up the pikestaff laid down by Brownlow and Mollo's *Winstanley* (1975). The final cut of Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* did not offer massive revelations but, as the archetypal folk horror flick, set the seal and the tone of the year's (re)discoveries. Meanwhile the art of the music documentary continued to flourish in the wake of last year's *Searching for Sugar Man*. Shane Meadows's *The Stone Roses: Made of Stone*, Jay Bulger's terrifying encounter with Ginger Baker, *Beware of Mr. Baker*, and Elizabeth Rasmussen's examination of a lost punk legend *The Heart of Bruno Wizard*, all made for compelling film portraits of misplaced genius. Finally, two small but perfectly formed movies I enjoyed this year were Andrew Bujalski's early 80s-set nerd-fest *Computer Chess* and Pat Collins's *Silence*, where a field recording trip to the rugged Aran Islands stirs up buried memories of both a folk and personal nature. ☺



1 **The Act of Killing** *This experimental documentary is a horror show, a dagger, a guillotine, a confession box in an insane asylum. It's also a very frightening lesson on history and how we remember it.* Kong Rithdee



Dogwoof would like to congratulate the following films for their appearance in the Sight & Sound critics' poll of 2013

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★★★★★  
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★★★★★  
TIME OUT

★★★★★  
METRO

★★★★★  
INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

★★★★★  
SUNDAY TIMES

★★★★★  
EVENING STANDARD

★★★★★  
FINANCIAL TIMES

★★★★★  
DAILY MAIL

★★★★★  
INDEPENDENT

FILM OF THE YEAR  
METRO

# THE ACT OF KILLING

A FILM BY JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER

I HAVE NOT SEEN A FILM AS POWERFUL, SURREAL, AND FRIGHTENING IN AT LEAST A DECADE  
- WERNER HERZOG

No.1

ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND  NOW


dogwoof PRESENTS

No.13

# leviathan

A FILM BY LUCIEN CASTAING-TAYLOR AND VERENA PARAVEL  
DIRECTORS OF SWEETGRASS AND FOREIGN PARTS



ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND  MONDAY 9th DECEMBER



# BLOCKAGE ON THE LINE

*Bong Joonho's 'Snowpiercer' was one of the most anticipated films of 2013. But while it has been a hit in France and Korea, English-speaking audiences won't be able to see it for some time to come. This is more than just a case of the wrong kind of snow*

By Tony Rayns

There are lawyers in the room, so we need to speak softly. Bong Joonho's fifth feature *Snowpiercer* was shot on a huge sound-stage in Prague in the early months of 2013 and post-produced in Seoul in the late spring and early summer. Budgeted at around \$40 million, which makes it the most expensive Korean production to date, the film had a gala premiere in Seoul on 29 July and opened to the public on 1 August. It has so far grossed in the region of \$65 million in South Korea alone, has recently opened in France and is now rolling out through the main East Asian markets. But it was conspicuously absent from the autumn's major festivals in Europe and North America and (despite being almost entirely in English and starring Tilda Swinton, John Hurt and Jamie Bell among others) it has no scheduled release date in any English-speaking territory.

The film did play as a gala in the Busan Festival last October, and Bong introduced it there by alerting English speakers in the audience to the fact that it might well be their only chance to see it in his original version. This public announcement confirmed the truth of rumours that had been swirling through blogs and social network sites since July: that Bong was locked in a dispute over the editing of the film with The Weinstein Company (TWC), which had bought rights to *Snowpiercer* for six English-speaking markets and, amazingly, had contractual control over the film's release dates in various other markets too. The dispute is ongoing (as I said, lawyers are now involved), so the film's arrival in Britain – in any version – may well be long delayed.

*Snowpiercer* is based on the three-part French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* (by Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette, who make fleeting appearances in the film), which Bong came across in Europe some eight years ago. It's a very free adaptation. Only two ideas in the rather mediocre original caught Bong's attention: the notion that a very long train in perpetual motion around the globe carries the only human and animal survivors of a new ice age, and the notion that the train's division into first-class, second-class and cattle-class sections foments rebellion and a dream of revolution. Bong wrote his own original screenplay, later enlisting Kelly Masterson to help with the English dialogue. He reduced the length of the train, created new characters and a new backstory and turned the piece into a playful and sophisticated political satire. The film very smartly questions the point and efficacy of revolutionary solutions – an angle with particular resonance for Koreans of Bong's generation,

who were actively involved in protests against the military dictatorships that governed South Korea until 1993.

The first I heard of problems with the film's release came in a 14 July email from Bong. He was angered that programmers from the Locarno and Toronto festivals had been forbidden to preview the film by the Korean production company/distributor CJ Entertainment, on orders from TWC, on the grounds that the "TWC cut" – to be released in English-speaking territories, including the UK – was not yet finalised. He invited me to the premiere of the original version in Seoul and asked me to write about the film he had actually made. Of course, I accepted. But by the time I arrived in Seoul on 27 July, matters had moved on. A DCP (digital cinema package) of the original version had mysteriously found its way to the Magno screening room in New York, without the knowledge or approval of Harvey Weinstein, where it was watched by *Variety* critic Scott Foundas. His enthusiastic review ("enormously ambitious, visually stunning and richly satisfying") was posted on 22 July.

In Seoul, Bong told me about his fraught visit to the TWC office in New York earlier in the month. On arrival, he'd been greeted by Weinstein with a bear-hug and the words, "Director Bong, you are a genius!" But then he was asked to watch a rough re-edit of his own film prepared by TWC, purely, they insisted, to suggest to him how the film might be "improved" for American audiences. The improvements, according to Bong, included deletions of some 25 minutes (Bong's original runs for 119 minutes, plus six minutes of end-credits) and the elimination of most of the character-detail. TWC did not have access to the original picture and sound materials and so the re-editors had been forced to work on a DVD screener, but it was obvious to Bong that they were trying to turn *Snowpiercer* into a more conventional action-thriller. He was subsequently asked to come up with a shorter cut of his own, and to add explanatory voiceovers at the beginning and end of the film. TWC staffers explained to him that the film had to be made comprehensible to "audiences in Iowa and Oklahoma". Weinstein later suggested that his "friend" Neil Gaiman be approached to write the voiceovers, a proposal Bong quickly rejected.

Harvey Weinstein has always liked to present himself as a cinephile producer/distributor, but he didn't earn his nickname 'Scissorhands' for nothing. Back in the days when he and his brother Bob ran Miramax – before they sold the company to Disney – he was notorious for buying and then not releasing films. One example



**WAITING FOR A TRAIN**  
Clockwise from top left: Tilda Swinton as train master Mason; Chris Evans as Curtis, the rebel leader; Song Kangho as Namgoong Minsu, Ko Ahsung as Yona; John Hurt as Gilliam, engineer turned revolutionary





among many: Miramax bought North American rights to Ann Hui's *Summer Snow* (*Nüren Sishi*, 1995), a clued-in study of a woman coping with the problems of middle-age, including her father's dementia, and then not only failed to release it but also refused to let it screen in festivals. I found this completely baffling at the time, until an American friend suggested to me that there might be tax advantages in owning an "unrealised asset". I've no idea if that's really why Hui's film was shelved, but I do know that her reputation – and her prospects for selling later films in North America – weren't helped much by Miramax.

The company didn't so often cut or re-edit the films it bought back then, but the Japanese director Suo Masayuki once told me about his cautionary experience with Miramax over *Shall We Dance?* (1996). Weinstein had assured him that American audiences would never sit through a 2½-hour subtitled movie; he insisted on shortening the film for its US release, but suggested that the 'director's cut' could come out later. Suo's wry comment: "I'm still waiting."

At TWC, Weinstein's 'issues' with film-makers are

usually clashes over editing and running times. The joke currently going around Korean film circles is that the only Asian film ever released by TWC in its original cut is Ryoo Seungwan's *The City of Violence* (*Jjakbae*, 2006) – simply because Weinstein couldn't find anything to cut from a 93-minute movie. Some directors are happy enough to let Weinstein re-edit and shorten their work. The latest example would be Wong Kar Wai, whose *The Grandmaster* (2012) had been released in at least three different cuts before Weinstein demanded a shortened re-edit for the English-speaking territories he owns. But *The Grandmaster* is a shapeless and listless film, which flickers into dramatic life only very occasionally. Its best scenes are virtual re-runs of episodes already seen in Wong's earlier movies, such as the over-familiar motif of a man coldly rejecting the woman who loves him. (As in 2046, the actors going through these motions are Tony Leung and Zhang Ziyi.) By endlessly tinkering with the film, Wong is tacitly admitting that he never really found a way to please both his Chinese audience and his non-Chinese fans. Weinstein introduced the TWC version at the London Film Festival (it played as the 'surprise film') as the

*Harvey Weinstein has always liked to present himself as a cinephile producer/distributor, but he didn't earn his nickname 'Scissorhands' for nothing*





most “kick-ass” martial-arts movie since *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), which suggests that he sees it as something it never was in the first place.

In some of the interviews he’s given to promote *Snowpiercer* in France and Hong Kong, Bong has been saying emollient things about TWC: he’s called the staffers “nice people” and stressed his hope that they can “reach a good conclusion” over a “speedier” cut of the film. But, according to Richard Johnson’s 6 November report on the Page Six website, when Bong spoke at the Tilda Swinton tribute at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on 5 November, he referred to Weinstein with undisguised sarcasm (“Such a great man”) and publicly regretted that he couldn’t show the audience the film he’d made with Tilda. By email, Bong tells me that he swung by the TWC office again while he was in New York (“fucking hilarious”)... and that his original cut of the film will be showcased in the Berlin Film Festival in February. He and some of the actors will attend. This means that at least one Weinstein veto has been swept aside.

Nobody outside CJ and TWC – probably not even Bong himself – knows exactly what the lawyers are currently talking about. The happiest possible outcome would be for the TWC contract to be rescinded so that the film could be sold to other distributors in the English-speaking territories: distributors happy to show Bong’s original cut, already a proven hit in Korea and France. But Weinstein is not known for his eagerness to compromise, or for his willingness to admit that he might be in the wrong. Whatever happens, Bong is the first East Asian director to challenge (seemingly with some chance of success) Weinstein’s right to re-edit his film. The strength of his position is that he’s not coming on as a bleating auteur who’s determined to preserve the sanctity of his ‘vision’ but as the creator of a popular film that has already wowed audiences in Korea and France.

Discussion of *Snowpiercer* itself should obviously wait for the film’s appearance in Britain, in whatever version, but it’s hard to resist giving readers some idea of what they’re currently missing. Like Bong’s other films,

it’s rooted in genre but shot through with idiosyncrasies. Audience expectations are not so much confounded as exceeded. As we’ve noted, the film is fundamentally a political satire – but its political dimension emerges very naturally from the characters and situations, all of which feel right at home in an action-thriller.

Bong’s new backstory imagines that a future attempt to head off global warming has catastrophically backfired and caused the ice age that has extinguished life on the planet. The only person who saw this coming was the US industrialist billionaire Wilford, who built the *Snowpiercer* train and its track encircling the northern hemisphere, perfected the perpetual-motion engine, and sold off places in the elite sections of the train. Political differences with his engineer-partner Gilliam (John Hurt) have led to a schism; Gilliam now lives with the huddled masses in the tail of the train, where he inspires and guides a revolt against Wilford’s heavily guarded tyranny. Led somewhat hesitantly by Curtis (Chris Evans) and his sidekick (Jamie Bell), the uprising begins with an overtly phallic assault on the train’s prison-car to free the incarcerated designer of the security systems, Minsu (Bong’s regular star Song Kangho). It then makes slow progress through the protein-producing plant, the aquarium, the classroom, the greenhouse and the nursery and on to Wilford’s stronghold at the front.

At first sight, the uprising has an Eisensteinian simplicity and clarity: working-class vigour versus pampered bourgeois luxury. The assault inevitably comes up against fascistic counter-attacks; Bong gives us both hordes of identikit stormtroopers and a lone crack-shot killer (Vlad Ivanov, from *4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days*). But the privileged part of the train is better represented by the train master Mason (Tilda Swinton), a Yorkshire schoolmarm type with buck teeth and an inalienable sense of superiority... and by Wilford himself, seen only in the closing scenes, who turns out to be someone rather different from the ogre everyone has imagined. Typically, Bong places the sting in the tail of the film – but at the front of the train. ❧

*Bong is not a bleating auteur determined to preserve the sanctity of his ‘vision’ but the creator of a popular film that has already wowed audiences*

**GOING OFF THE RAILS**  
An early concept sketch by Bong Joonho for a scene from *Snowpiercer*, reproduced exclusively by S&S, with the director’s permission







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# THE FILM FESTIVAL READER

Edited by **Dina Iordanova**

ISBN: 9781908437099 (hardback)

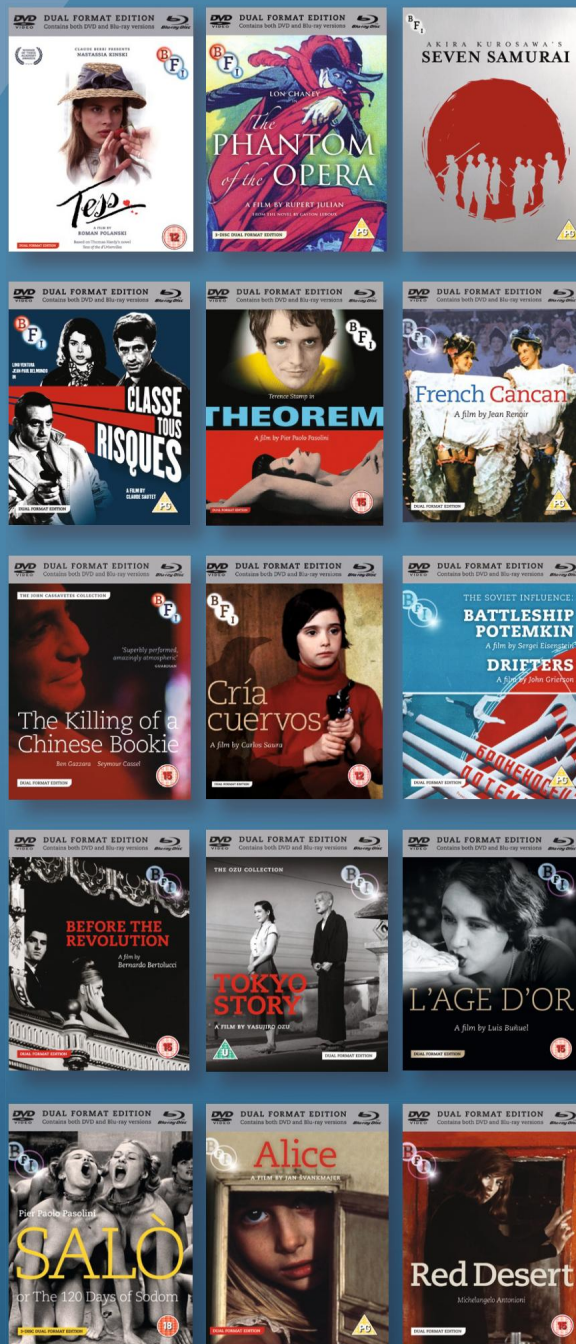
Available from all good bookshops, Amazon and at [www.stafs.org](http://www.stafs.org)  
St Andrews Film Studies, 2013

What is the importance of **film festivals** in the context of **film culture** at large? What logic reigns within the **film festival** galaxy? Are **film festivals** tools of power and prestige that make or break the fate of a **film**? Or do they effectively seal diverse and unique **cinema** from the wider public whilst simultaneously professing to celebrate it? What are the key features and who are the key stakeholders of the **film festival**? What, if anything, is wrong with the concept of '**festival films**'? What makes a good **film festival** good or a bad one bad? It is these and other questions that are raised and treated in the classic texts included in this anthology. With contributions from, among others, **Paul Willemen**, **Bill Nichols**, **Thomas Elsaesser**, **Daniel Dayan** and **Julian Stringer**, as well as **Mark Cousins**, **Ruby Rich**, **Sean Farnel** and **Chris Fujiwara**, the volume aims to foster the discussion and definition of the role of **film festivals** in the wider context of **film culture**.



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# THE OLD MAN





# AND THE SEA



**MAN AGAINST HIMSELF**  
In *All Is Lost* (left), the 76-year-old Robert Redford plays a solo sailor who wakes in the middle of the Indian Ocean to find the hull of his yacht has been gashed by a rogue shipping container

*Robert Redford's intense, elemental performance in J.C. Chandor's exceptional survival drama 'All Is Lost' sees the actor turn his back on his screen persona to portray an ordinary man facing extraordinary challenges*

**By David Thomson**

There have been so many movies about extraordinary perseverance in the face of nature. There was *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948), with music by Vaughan Williams, and the last five men who did not make it home; Tom Hanks in *Cast Away* (2000); *Nanook of the North* (1922); Aguirre in search of El Dorado. The Torrance family up at the Overlook? A couple of years ago Peter Weir made an absurdly neglected film, *The Way Back* (2010), in which a few prisoners from a Siberian gulag walked 4,000 miles through snow and desert to the bright-green tea fields of India. In *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) there is the crossing of Sinai, dramatised you'd have to say, with that Maurice Jarre music thundering away, but Lawrence was a self-dramatist. In *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972), shot largely in Utah, Robert Redford played a man sick of war who learns to survive in the mountain wilderness, no matter that he loses his family and finds only solitariness. Redford then was 36 and he did a lot of the tough action things himself. That film was linked to his own fondness for the Utah terrain and for places there like Sundance where he bought land in the 60s. The site grew into a festival and an institute, but not for solitaires or wilderness men. *A River Runs Through It* (1992), from the Norman Maclean novella, may still be the picture in which Redford the director made his lasting pact with the land. Now he faces the sea.

Forty years after *Jeremiah Johnson*, as writer-director J.C. Chandor saw it, "Redford was about the only actor who could do *All Is Lost*. If he hadn't said yes so quickly and then had not wavered – well, I don't know. I knew this character had to be old, and the film could not cheat on the physicality of what he does. To be honest, I didn't think Clint Eastwood or Jack Nicholson were in shape to do it. And I told Bob that he would really have to *do* it – the labour, the storms, working the boat, being in the water. We weren't going to be kind or pleasant to him with make-up, lighting or angles. I wanted him to look the way he did, and I told him he might look older than he did in person."

Chandor had started this project as he cut *Margin Call* (2011). He had a long train ride into New York to the cutting rooms, and that's how he started to write a letter that became a treatment for the new film. It was 31 pages and it began with the message the man would cast away in a bottle when his yacht has foundered and he reckons he's going with it. Chandor got the script to Redford and the actor had to see that there were no other characters in the film; his part had no name – it's 'Our Man' in the credits – and he uttered hardly a word. All he does is wake up on his yacht one morning to find a rogue container, slipped off a cargo ship, has gashed his boat and destroyed its communication systems. He is about





1,700 miles from Sumatra, he is 76, and he would be on camera all the time.

"So we had a meeting," says Chandor, "and I still don't know whether at that time he'd seen *Margin Call*. But he'd heard of it. And I learned later that he and his producer Bill Holderman told each other before the meeting, 'Don't make up your mind. Don't say anything.' But after five minutes he said, yes, he was in. We hit it off, but we all knew that it was going to be maybe an \$8 or 9 million picture."

So Redford was fit enough to be *Our Man* and he had the aura of an outdoorsman who might go off on a single-handed voyage round the world. But there was something else about the arrangement and it sinks in after you see *All is Lost* and put it in the context of Redford in the last 15 years. This man was beloved – the Sundance Kid (in 1969) and *The Sting* (1973) with Paul Newman (a brotherhood), *The Way We Were* (1973), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), Bob Woodward in *All the President's Men* (1976), *Out of Africa* (1985). Then he directed two careful but impressive films – *Ordinary People* (1980) and *Quiz Show* (1994). He had founded Sundance and its festival. He stood for a new type of independent cinema, no matter that 'Robert Redford' was one of Hollywood's last uncompromised creations. But something happened. He acted in some rather poor films, and then some that were worse than that (*Up Close & Personal* in 1996, *The Horse Whisperer* in 1998, *The Last Castle* in 2001). He kept directing, but the pictures felt remote and academic, as if made by an elder statesman (*Lions for Lambs* in 2007, *The Conspirator* in 2010, *The Company You Keep* in 2012). He sometimes seemed like a man who was too busy protecting his own image – though people close to Redford said he had always had mixed feelings over his looks, his respectability and being Robert Redford. You heard he could be as difficult as he was likely to be late for a meeting.

As Chandor recalls, "He gave us the full effort. He was prepared. But he never commented on the script. He never suggested changes, or worried about how he looked. He looked like a man who was suffering from sunburn, dehydration and losing it. Whenever he happened to pass a monitor and he was on it, he lowered his head and kept walking."

It's remarkable that Redford should discover this persona so late in the day. For decades it was impossible for us to ignore how handsome he was, and why should he not be taken up with the same dream? He never played a jerk, a fool or a bad guy (except perhaps in *Downhill Racer* in 1969). If you want a point of comparison, then the young Gary Cooper could be it, in that his equation of beauty and nobility was natural and unforced. Of course, that assurance was easier in Coop's day. In Redford's time respect for the paragon has disappeared from the world. That's how as an actor he sometimes looked stranded. The best thing about *All is Lost* is that while *Our Man* may be wealthy enough to have a yacht, and idealistic enough to try this voyage, he is a deeply ordinary person, and someone coming to terms with that ominous but mysterious title. All is lost? Then, why bother?

Redford will have his answer to that, though he may never admit it. But Chandor's answer is just as instructive. *All is Lost* is an unexpected picture in so many ways, and I see no reason to imagine in advance that Chandor would need to make it. But isn't *Margin Call* the best

movie about the most perilous crisis of modern times? Of course, 'perilous' is an old-fashioned movie word, with the connotation that where there's danger there's a chance for survival. The point about *Margin Call* is that the company cannot escape its mortgage-based debt crisis. It is going broke. The only thing it can do is cut its losses by behaving in a murderous way to its old clients. It's not just that all is lost in the financial sense, but all honour has gone with it. When the Kevin Spacey character buries his dog at the end of the ghastly day, everything in sight needs a funeral. It's not just that "greed is good", to quote Gordon Gekko in what now seems like the rather innocent *Wall Street* (1987), but greed is nature, along with fear. *Margin Call* was a commercial movie; it cost \$3.5 million, and it grossed \$5.3 million. It was far too grim for many people to watch, especially if they had money or relatives in the market.

Jeffrey Chandor will be 40 by the time this piece appears. He was born in New Jersey and attended the College of Wooster, a small liberal arts school in Ohio. That's where he started to get an interest in film. He made a short film and people said it was promising, but then he let himself be diverted into doing television commercials. "Around the time I was 30 I think I was losing it. I felt myself dwindling and I seemed to have let down my own promise. I was letting the years slide by and believing that opportunity would come to me – instead of knowing I had to go out and get it."

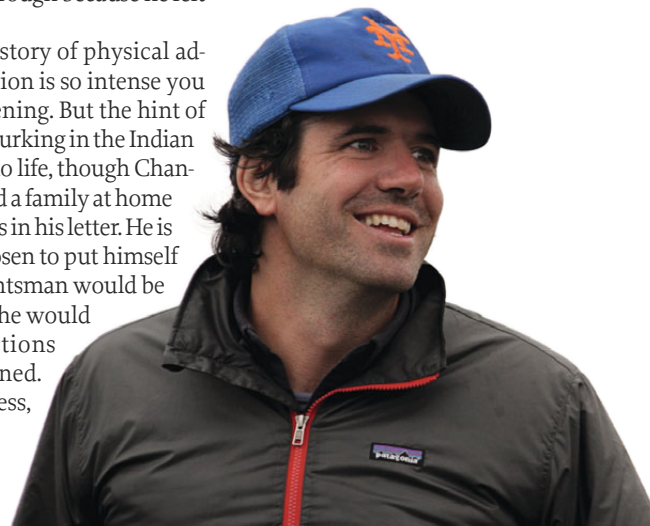
He has sailed a little. He taught sailing to kids at a summer camp, and once he was on a crew that got into a lively two-day blow in the Caribbean. But the proximity of danger and loss is part of his life in another way. While he was in college, he and three friends were driving in a Suburban in upstate Michigan. They had been off on a vacation weekend and somehow all four of them fell asleep at 80 miles an hour. The vehicle rolled over six or seven times. One guy was thrown out and got up unhurt. Jeffrey broke his back and another friend was killed. Chandor reckons it took him five or six years to get over the shock and to realise that every day was a gift.

How did all this lead to *Our Man*? And why is *All is Lost* so remarkable? A lot of it was filmed off the Baja coast with a large tank being used for the storm scenes. That doesn't mean that Redford wasn't violently thrown around. But this is not Donald Crowhurst filmed on his boat days before he took the fatal plunge during his ill-fated round-the-world voyage in 1969. Chandor started out to watch *Deep Water* (2006), the documentary about Crowhurst directed by Louise Osmond and Jerry Rothwell, but he had to stop halfway through because he felt it would overwhelm him.

So *All is Lost* is an unrelenting story of physical adventure and ordeal. Its concentration is so intense you may feel exhausted after the screening. But the hint of metaphor is as powerful as sharks lurking in the Indian Ocean. *Our Man* has no given ties to life, though Chandor and Redford decided that he had a family at home and they are the people he addresses in his letter. He is not sailing in a race, but he has chosen to put himself to a test. Nicholson, say, as the yachtsman would be a lot more wry and explosive, but he would not have the automatic associations with nature that Redford has earned. Sundance has turned into a business,



**BORN SURVIVOR**  
Director J.C. Chandor (below) believed Robert Redford was the only actor of his generation who was capable of meeting the intense physical demands of the role







and that may pain the actor-director. In 2008, the Sundance channel was sold to Rainbow Media – it plays with commercials now, though Redford still plugs some pictures. But his commitment to the wild places remains authentic. So it means more than mere description can say when this sailor – in broad daylight – is passed by a vast, fully loaded container ship that hums along as if he was not there. Small lives in *Margin Call* are ignored in the same way. The sailor cries out and waves his arms, but the commercial empire of the seas cannot see him, no matter that it was one of its lost containers that caused all his grief.

As you watch *All is Lost*, it's hard not to wonder how the film can end, and whether the title is not its own spoiler. I don't want to go into the ending in detail, and Chandor intends the last few moments of the picture as a challenge to the audience. In a way, your opinion of what happens at the end is a test of your own philosophy. The conclusion, at night, is the most beautiful part of the film and it is preceded by the first attempt to view the yacht from beneath the water as some alien form surrounded and nurtured by marine nature.

If this is like a Hawks movie, grappling with physical adventure (but without women or rivals), still it closes as a Bressonian film. In fire and darkness, *All is Lost* becomes a mystery – or open-ended – in its last seconds in a way that puts “the nick of time” next to much larger questions about time and endurance. It's likely that Redford appreciated his good fortune when he read the 31-page treatment. Our Man is an ideal role for a recessive actor, for it presents a crisis that will discover his nature. Eastwood might have tried it ten years ago, but perhaps he has always been too sure of himself. Gary Cooper would have been the man in 1950. As it is, an actor who has sometimes seemed distant from many realities because of his beauty and his shy superiority has found himself in an elemental role, a man determined to make the attempt at life. I never expected to say this but Redford may have bumped into the prospect of an acting Oscar just as Our Man's yacht encounters a brick-red outlaw escaped from a container ship 1,700 nautical miles from Sumatra.

*If 'All Is Lost' plays as a Hawks movie, grappling with physical adventure, still it closes as a Bressonian film, in fire and darkness*



**All Is Lost** is released in the UK on 26 December and is reviewed on page 70



# ALEXANDER PAYNE

With his idiosyncratic, gently comic films, the director has shown a canny ability to walk the line between mainstream acceptance and indie credibility – and his latest, the bittersweet black-and-white road movie *Nebraska*, is no exception. **Interview by Neil McGlone** PLUS the film's star Bruce Dern talks to **Nick Pinkerton**

Alexander Payne's sixth feature film, *Nebraska*, finds him refining a signature tone that's served him well across a string of acclaimed and often beloved comic dramas, while at the same time prodding away gently at some of the perceived precepts of major studio filmmaking.

By eschewing the use of big stars (unless we count erstwhile supporting legend Bruce Dern) and overcoming fierce resistance from his backers to film in black and white, Payne could be said to be cashing in some of the chips earned from his earlier, modestly budgeted, high-yield successes.

In fact Payne has always seemed somehow to navigate a path between mainstream acceptance and independent spirit. The wild clamour for his signature after the screening of his graduate film *The Passion of Martin* at Sundance in 1991 led on to a contract at Universal. There he spent several years developing a script called *The Coward* (which would later become 2002's *About Schmidt*), before he popped up with the independently mounted, Miramax-backed *Citizen Ruth* (1996). The critical success of *Election* (1999) was followed by a brave attempt at drawing Jack Nicholson out of autopilot mode for *About Schmidt*, producing a performance that may turn out to be the great actor's last significant starring role. But star names were absent from *Sideways* (2004), the film in which Payne seemed to have perfected his brand of understated humour and bittersweet pathos and which for many marks the high-point of his oeuvre so far. It also earned him the establishment kudos of a best adapted screenplay Oscar, so the seven-year wait that preceded the arrival of *The Descendants* in 2011 was keenly felt and the film subsequently closely dissected. This supposed hiatus, however, did produce arguably the most touching and heartfelt of all his works, '14e arrondissement', his unforgettable contribution to the ensemble film *Paris, je t'aime*.

At first glance the muted monochrome look of *Nebraska* does seem a stark contrast to its glossy and more polished predecessor *The Descendants*, hinting that Payne may be angling once more for US indie acceptance, having once been a prime mover of the movement in the late 1990s. And it's not just the look of the film that seems to represent a step away from the mainstream; there's a dialled-down,

drawn-out feel to proceedings, in which comic sequences are allowed to develop in a measured manner, rather than marching inexorably towards identifiable set-piece punchlines.

Payne's too much of a classicist, however, to entirely abandon time-honoured storytelling traditions, and it's difficult to imagine any Mumblecore director countenancing the inclusion of a character as humble, sincere and irony-free

## ON ALEXANDER PAYNE

**'We don't really shot-list or storyboard. What we do is we watch movies we feel are more or less relevant to what we're doing. We're drinking wine and eating pasta and showing each other films.'**

**It is important for the photography not to be flashy, but to feel real. Alexander has this saying: 'Keep the banality of things.' So we don't touch anything on locations. Even when we shoot somebody driving somewhere, we shoot on the road the character would have to take.'**

DP Phedon Papamichael

**'We look at the same screen and write at the same time. We call the couch the "thinking area", which really means, "I want to take a nap." Then after a half-hour of keys clacking, the other one will get up and look, then we'll work together. Lots of times, we just sit and write word for word looking at the screen, one of us typing. Sometimes we hook up two machines. *Citizen Ruth* we wrote over a number of years because we were doing other things, then *Election* took us about six months. We take a long time. [If it's an adaptation] generally, we read the book a few times, talk about it, make notes, then put it away.'**

Payne's regular writing partner Jim Taylor

**'Boy's got a mind of his own.'**

Jack Nicholson

as David Grant (Will Forte), the son at the film's centre. It's David's dutiful generosity that sets the story in motion after he insists on escorting his senile father Woody (Dern) on his deluded interstate quest to cash in what he believes is a winning, million-dollar prize-draw ticket.

Woody is an uncomfortably tragic figure, his unwitting mental infirmity denying him even a fleeting semi-awareness of his quest's futility, and he could be seen as an emblem of the decaying grandeur of America itself. This once hardy exemplar of post-war idealism is now reduced to a mumbling, shuffling shadow; a Korean War veteran whose taciturn reserve is revealed to be not so much dignified reticence as obfuscating emotional immaturity. Woody is also unable to drive – the ultimate expression of American freedom – having lost his license as a result of alcoholism; another telling symbol of the erosion of former potency.

Payne is returning here to a theme explored in *About Schmidt*; that of ageing and the importance of retaining pride in the face of oncoming deterioration. In doing so he coaxes a miraculous performance out of the long under-used Dern, one that primarily relies on body language and subtle expression to convey Woody's confusion, desperation and regret.

Also recurring from previous works is the idea of a pivotal physical pilgrimage that doubles as a journey of self-discovery. Payne again utilises the dynamics of the road movie, not to express the more common theme of a yearning for escape, but instead to emphasise the psychological primacy of belonging, establishing and – significantly – accepting one's true home. Most of Payne's movies are either set in or reference his home state, but here it's so central it has become the title of the film itself.

Ultimately, Woody and David's journey comes to a halt just as it's getting going, with the majority of the film taking place in the small-town family bedrock of Hawthorne. Their extended pit-stop, augmented by the eventual arrival of matriarch Kate (June Squibb) and sibling Ross (Bob Odenkirk), allows for some gentle exhuming of long-buried, uncomfortable truths and the opportunity to settle a few festering scores, such as a simmering feud with the





PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANTONIO OLGAOS / EYEYNE



town blowhard, Ed Pegram (Stacy Keach). But by the end of the film Payne makes a subtle shift by presenting a rapprochement of sorts between David's suburban liberalism and the small-town conservatism of his Hawthorne relatives, who are hitherto presented as greedy and largely ignorant sorts.

This ambivalence typifies the duality at the core of Payne's work and his approach – the comfortingly conservative themes observed with a contemporary, non-judgemental air; the modest, intimate stories told via a bold Hollywood lexicon; the characters suffused with empathetic warmth who are nevertheless mercilessly lampooned for their moral shortcomings – explains why he maintains his near-exalted stature with audiences, critics and Hollywood executives alike.

The backdrop for our conversation below was Bologna's *Il Cinema Ritrovato*, the archival cinema festival that provided suitably wistful surroundings for a discussion of *Nebraska's* nostalgic nuances, while also allowing Payne to unwind from post-production duties and indulge his avowed cinephilia.

**Neil McGlone:** You chose to shoot *Nebraska* in black and white. How early was this decision reached?

**Alexander Payne:** When I first read the screenplay nine years ago I knew I wanted to make this in black and white. Then I announced it again when the time arrived to make it, and they all acted surprised, both the producers and the studio. Plus, it was two or three studio regimes later, so they had no memory of what the original discussions had been nine years previous. For a long while we couldn't get the film off the ground because they wouldn't approve the budget anywhere close to what I needed.

**NM:** I understand you actually shot it in colour at the studio's insistence, as they intend to screen it that way on cable and other TV outlets. How do you feel about that version being out there?

**AP:** It's not colour or black and white; we shot digital, so all the visual information is there. As part of the deal, I agreed to help them solve their major complaint, which is that their TV deals in certain countries stipulate colour-only. They consider how much money they're leaving on the table by not being able to supply a colour version. So my response is, "First of all, that's why I'm coming to you with an inexpensive film, if you're potentially not going to make as much money back. It would never occur to me to suggest this with a film needing a larger budget. And second, for those very, very specific outlets, I will supply a colour version. I hope you don't need it, but in case you do for Moldovan television, Chad Arte or Channel 4 Laos, then I'll have something for you." I figure today's TV screening wraps tomorrow's fish. But my contract stipulates black and white for theatrical, DVD and streaming.

**NM:** When shooting the film in this way, were you conscious of composing shots differently because of the format, and did it add a different level of complexity?

**AP:** Whether colour or black and white, this particular story asked for a very austere visual style, and by that I mean really precise framing and as little cutting as possible. Not that I wanted it to be exactly like early Jarmusch,

but early Jarmusch gives that example of very clean, simple framing and orchestrating the actors for the frame. That would have been true even were the film in colour.

**NM:** So you didn't necessarily approach the film differently just because it was black and white?

**AP:** All my films have had relatively low budgets so I have to think about how to shoot things efficiently but still elegantly. That's not a bad thing. On this one I had the fewest days I've had on any of my features. The story asked for it anyway, since the screenplay was only 91 pages and suggested an austere visual style. Normally for my films I have at least 50 days of shooting, but for this one I had only 36 – a price of the [decision to shoot in] black and white. The entire situation encouraged the DP and me to simplify things as much as possible, but that's okay, always a good exercise – up to a point.

A difficulty with fewer days is not having as much time to await the right light, and not as much time to massage performance. You need time to shoot performance films, because that's all there is, and in movies we don't rehearse to speak of, so you need time for performance – especially when you simultaneously try to make it visually beautiful. And if I'm having the rare opportunity to shoot a Hollywood movie in black and white, I really want it to be as beautiful as possible – both for the sake of this film and also for future filmmakers who want to shoot black and white. A black-and-white movie today should knock your socks off. In fact, when I was negotiating with the studio, I said, "If you're afraid of the black and white, then you should actually give me *more* days and *more* money, to make sure it's visually beautiful. You should be spending *more* money on this film, not less!" They didn't see it that way.

**NM:** Did you watch any black-and-white 'Scope films in preparation?

*I don't really care about format when shooting, but I will always prefer film projection. Flicker will always be superior to glow*

**AP:** Yes, a few, and not necessarily 'Scope. We watched more contemporary black-and-white films rather than older Hollywood films as those were very [artificially] lit and we were making a contemporary film relying more on natural light.

**NM:** So like Jarmusch, to whom you just referred?

**AP:** Yeah, but even going back to the 50s. We watched *The Tarnished Angels* (1957), *The Sweet Smell of Success* (1957) and then we looked at *Hud* (1963), of course *Seconds* (1965), *Paper Moon* (1973), *Manhattan* (1979), *Stranger than Paradise* (1984) and *The Last Picture Show* (1971). A few others too. We didn't look at *Schindler's List* (1993) or the Coen brothers film *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001).

**NM:** I guess there's an interesting parallel with the Coens' film and yours as that was another film that was made available in a colour version for more obscure markets.

**AP:** Different in that they shot on colour stock, something we opted not to do because the grain structure is quite different. In order to make their studio deal at the time, I believe, they shot on colour stock, and then printed it black and white. They then provided a colour version for the specific TV deals. We did make tests – we shot black-and-white stock, we shot colour stock, and we shot both RED and finally Alexa [digital Arriflex camera], which we ended up using. The reason we went with Alexa over black-and-white stock was the low budget. The only black-and-white stock still made plentifully is quite slow, rated at ISO 200. We were looking at only 36 days, including ambitious night exteriors, and that's what kills you on films, the night exteriors. We could rate the Alexa much higher, which means fewer lights, which in turn means fewer guys, which means I have more time for the actors. Thank god the technology is so much better now than when I first read the script nine years ago. I won't say digital is exactly indistinguishable from film, but it's very close, and then in the DI [digital intermediate] we add grain and contrast. You can grab everything that's a different colour and lighten it or darken it. So sometimes in certain scenes we were putting colour in there because we wanted to give ourselves leeway in the DI to adjust the tonality. I'll do a film-out



Couch trip: Rance Howard as Uncle Ray, Devin Ratray as Cole and Tim Driscoll as Bart in *Nebraska*



[the process of transferring the digital file to a traditional film print] as well. Now what I feel is that I don't really care about format when shooting, but I will always prefer film projection. Flicker will always be superior to glow.

**NM:** A large number of your films have been adapted from novels, but *Nebraska* was written by first-timer Bob Nelson as a screenplay. How different was this process for you on this film?

**AP:** Kind of the same. Whether I'm adapting a novel or retooling a screenplay, I'm still taking someone else's work and entering into a dialogue with it. When a director takes a screenplay written by someone else, it doesn't necessarily mean the film is any less personal. Scorsese doesn't have a screenplay credit on any of his great early work, yet we all see it as intensely personal. It's the director's obligation to find ways in which the story is personal to him or her. You must infuse the directing of the film with personal feelings.

**NM:** Do you feel it's easier, though, working with your regular writing collaborator Jim Taylor rather than working from somebody else's screenplay like *Nebraska*?

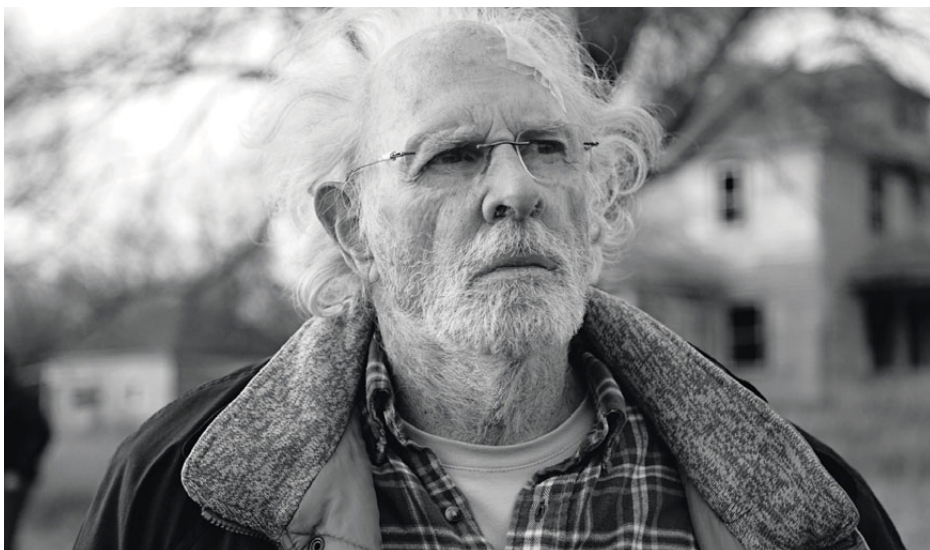
**AP:** Well, I did rewrite it. I actually retyped every word, editing along the way or adding something new. It had gone through my brain and out my fingertips. I also had Phil Johnston, who'd written *Cedar Rapids*, do a pass, and many of his lines found their way into the finished film as well. Even Jim Taylor added a line, and every time I see the film with an audience and that line gets a laugh, I think of him.

**NM:** So it's more 'adapted' from Bob Nelson's screenplay?

**AP:** No, it's Bob's screenplay. My process was more one of bevelling the edges to fashion it so I could direct it, and make it more [in tune with] my sensibility, my sense of humour. And I did write the ending. His ending – and he'd be the first to admit it – was almost there but not quite. Jim Taylor says that when a director reads a screenplay, he hopes to find at least five truly delightful moments, but when he and I write, we try to have what we think is something delightful on every page. That's the very word we use: 'delightful'. We think films should be delightful, no matter the subject matter, no matter the tone. Kurosawa used to say, "A film should foremost be entertaining and understandable." Anyway, Bob's screenplay was loaded with delightful moments, but I needed to do a pass to make the whole thing more specific to me.

**NM:** Can you speak about the casting of Bruce Dern? It's been well publicised that you initially wanted Gene Hackman, and I understand Robert Duvall, Robert Forster and even Jack Nicholson were considered?

**AP:** I would have been happy to meet Hackman, but he won't come out of retirement. I originally wanted Bruce Dern, and he'd lobbied for it almost since I first read the script. He came to my office in summer of 2011, because I'd hoped to start shooting as early as that fall, but the studio and I couldn't work out the black-and-white issue, so I walked away from the film. Then almost a year later, Bruce came in yet again, and he was delightful, and I asked him very respectfully to read aloud just a few words of the text. Six



**Bruce almighty:** Bruce Dern as Woody Grant in *Nebraska*

words into his reading, the casting director and I finally knew 100 per cent that we'd found him.

**NM:** And the casting of Will Forte? I understand that Casey Affleck and Matthew Modine were considered?

**AP:** Yes, I met with both. The nice thing about meetings and auditions – and actors know this, too – is that it's not necessarily only about this job. It's also a chance for us to meet. The audition process is not one of judgement and humiliation; it's a beautiful time for actors and directors to have an excuse to get to know one another. I was very impressed with Modine, and he'd be interesting to work with one day.

Affleck is someone I had considered for the film from the get-go. The two I had considered, even before the audition process, were Affleck, who I think is a wonderful actor, and Ty Burrell, the star now of *Modern Family*. I'd met him while auditioning for *Sideways*, and he's really good. And during auditions, I met a couple of others I liked immensely. All those guys would have been great in the film, too, but neither is Bruce Dern's son. They were two more I

potentially had in my arsenal. But I believed Will Forte as Bruce Dern's son, and I loved what Forte uniquely was able to bring to the part.

**NM:** You've said in interviews before that if you're doing your job properly the audience should forget that it's Jack Nicholson or George Clooney up there on the big screen and immerse themselves in the story. How do you believe you go about achieving that?

**AP:** How do I do that?

**NM:** I suppose, let's say as a film buff you yourself might go and see a Hollywood classic because it stars, say, Jimmy Stewart. So I guess it's not too different to expect a modern audience to be attracted to Clooney films.

**AP:** I'm an American filmmaker taking money from studios, working in the commercial narrative American vernacular. That's where I parachuted on to Earth. And stars can be great, if they're actually good actors.

Your initial question, though, about how do I make them become part of the fabric is that I treat them as actors, and by trying to bring the star to the part rather

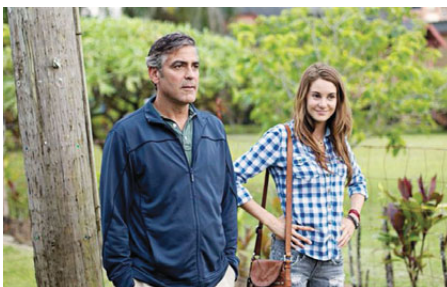


**Fight club:** Tim Driscoll as Bart and Bob Odenkirk as Ross Grant in *Nebraska*





Election



The Descendants



About Schmidt

than the part to the star. In casting the part, it shouldn't be a huge stretch. Nicholson was right for *About Schmidt*, and Clooney was right for *The Descendants*.

**NM:** The industry has changed somewhat since you started. With directors like Soderbergh, Mamet, Campion and even yourself working in television for HBO etc, do you feel an irresistible pull in that direction?

**AP:** Not for me – my only foray into television was a pilot [*Hung*, 2009]. I've never created a series; it was just one experience. I still believe in cinema and am not ready to go into television. I respect the hell out of it, because that's where the best work is being done right now in US narrative. All the majors are making Roger Corman[-style] films, so the adult pictures are being made in television, either in series or movies. I still love the big screen, and someone has to be doing that. I don't do it out of a sense of preciousness or responsibility; I do it because I love it. I was a teenager in the 70s, and those are the movies which made me want to become a filmmaker. Those movies taught me what a commercial adult feature film is. I haven't changed, they've changed. But so far I've had good luck making what I hope are those kinds of movies.

**NM:** How do you see the current state of Hollywood? Do you see a future for the kind of films you make within it?

**AP:** Of course I see a future, because I'm actually making the films I would like to. I can decry that there aren't more adult comedies and dramas, but of course I have hope. I just wish more people were trying. I wish the studios would spend the money and the man-hours on adult comedies and dramas that cost between \$25 million and \$35 million. There's money to be made there. Not everything has to be a huge gamble and a huge home run. And we filmmakers have to keep our prices down. Films are too expensive. *The Descendants* cost \$22 million or \$23 million, and my current one is \$13 million. I need my films to make money. I don't need a huge hit; I only need for my films to turn a decent profit, so that I can keep making movies. At the same time, I wish all my budgets weren't always so damned shrink-wrapped.

**NM:** You've been refining a specific style for some time now. Do you ever feel like breaking out into another genre? I know during dinner a couple of years ago we were discussing *Barry Lyndon* and you said you'd love to direct a Thackeray novel, as a straight period drama? Or how would you even feel about shooting outside the US?

**AP:** I'd like to do so many different films and see who I am within other genres. I'm dying to shoot outside the US and in another language. I'd love

*I am disappointed in films with no jokes. You have to have a joke in your film somehow. Even 'Amour' has its funny moments*

to make big-budget movies as well as continue to make smaller ones. I'd like to make a thriller, a western, a horror film, a challenging 'art film'. But always the number one question – the only question, really – is: what is the screenplay?

**NM:** Would humour still play a part? I know the other night you indicated that even if making a drama, thriller or period film you felt there should still be an element of humour included.

**AP:** I don't know if I can avoid who I am. In general, I am disappointed in films with no jokes. You have to have a joke in your film somehow. Even *Amour* (2012) has its funny moments, how she continues to control him and how hapless he is as she goes downhill.

**NM:** Do you feel you have a good relationship with the studios you've worked with and perhaps are in a privileged position to be one of the few directors who has final cut?

**AP:** I've had a terrific rapport with the studios, particularly the last two I worked with, Fox and Paramount. They've been great. They enjoy working with me because if I am indeed making the kind of films that they don't typically make anymore, I keep them under budget, and they've made a little money. Even though as professionals it's their job to be making larger tent-pole films nowadays, as filmgoers they still like the movies that you and I do. So they're happy to have me and the few remaining directors who, like me, are making more old-fashioned films – as long as we keep our budgets low.

As far as final cut goes, I don't really know who has it and who doesn't. That's what it says on my IMDb profile: "One of the few directors who has final cut." As I say, I don't really know who has it and who doesn't.



Sideways

**NM:** So are you indicating you don't have it?

**AP:** Of course I do; it has been in my contract since *About Schmidt*. But look, it's actually very rare for a studio to step in and recut someone's film, even if the director doesn't have final cut. It's too much work. They want you to do it. The way I look at it is that we're talking about a gun. It's not loaded, the safety is on and it's in a locked box. Everyone is against violence, and nobody ever wants to see the gun. But I want it under my bed. Interestingly, I find that having final cut makes me much more open to hearing suggestions.

**NM:** I've heard you say before that young filmmakers should avoid selling their souls to the studio and try to retain creative control.

**AP:** I think it depends who the director is! In the Harrison Ford introduction to [the Bologna screening of] Jacques Demy's *Model Shop* (1969) he says: "They hire the people who want to be rich and famous to make the types of films they want to make." That was horrifying and true. If some directors already want to be a part of that system, let them, I don't care. American directors of my generation, like me or David Russell, Spike Jonze – we wouldn't know how to do it. I think – I hope – we'd always want to be true to ourselves; it's just who we are. If someone seems to be selling out, then that's who he or she really is. Maybe for them it's not even selling out. It's just what it is – it's just a different kind of filmmaking.

**NM:** We're talking at *Il Cinema Ritrovato* festival. I'm interested in the relationship between you as a film buff and you as a film-maker. Presumably you study film not only for pleasure but also with an eye to gleaning something from your precursors? So, for instance, can you see any trace of the Italian directors I know you admire hugely – Monicelli, Risi, etc – in your own work?

**AP:** That's always a very hard question. My standard answer is that I can tell you some of my favourite film directors, but I cannot aver that what I glean from their work finds its way into my own. From the moment you're on set, and there's the camera, and there're the actors, and there're the producers tapping their watches, and there're the clouds drifting over the sun, you're on your own. You can turn around and see the ghosts of De Sica, Welles and Kurosawa, but they're laughing at you. But this is also beautiful, as it should be – I don't want to make a Welles film. I want to make a Payne film, and to make it as well as I can. 🍷

**i** **Nebraska** is released in the UK on 6 December and is reviewed on page 85. A retrospective, 'Tales of Ordinary Madness: The American Dream According to Alexander Payne', will screen at BFI Southbank, London until 27 December





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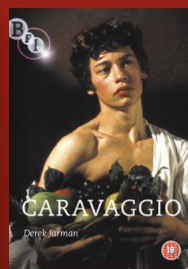
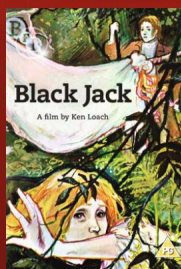
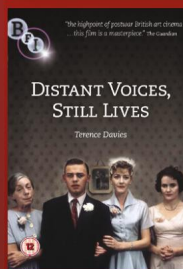
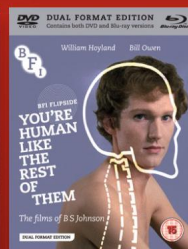
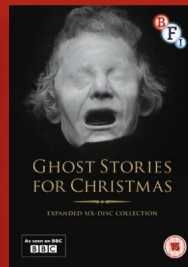
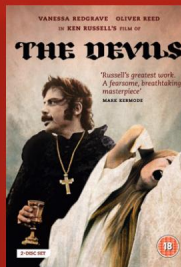
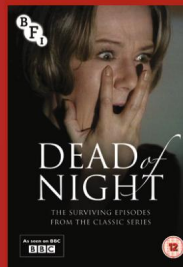
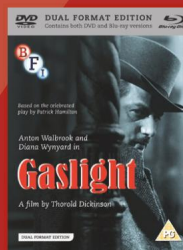
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# Bruce Dern

## 'IT WAS THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME'

The star of *Nebraska* explains what drew him to the near-silent role of Woody Grant, and casts his mind back over 50-plus years in the fray

**By Nick Pinkerton**

Watching *Nebraska*—as fine as it was, as much as Alexander Payne has impressed me as a trustworthy director, as true as his instincts seemed throughout—a part of me kept dreading The Big Speech.

To back up a bit: Payne's sixth feature film (and first shot in black and white) won its star Bruce Dern, now 77, a best actor award at Cannes for playing one of the most taciturn roles of his career. Dern's Woody Grant, a retired mechanic living in Billings, Montana, is introduced on the shoulder of a highway, having set out to walk to Lincoln, Nebraska, some 900 miles away. The police pick up Woody, who's been stripped of his driver's licence. Woody's younger son, David (Will Forte), brings the old man home to his wife, Kate (June Squibb), who simply begs to be described as long-suffering. Kate exacts her revenge on Woody by talking about him like he's not in the room. He really isn't all there, a lifelong drunk settling into what appears to be the early stages of Alzheimer's disease, though one idea has become stuck in his craw. A piece of sweepstakes junk-mail has told Woody that if he can get to Lincoln, a million-dollar prize will be waiting for him there, and the true north of his mental compass is stuck on that idea. (As to what he'd do with a million dollars, Woody can't think further than buying a new pickup truck.) At an impasse in his own life and eager to disabuse his dad of this illusion, David agrees to drive Woody to Lincoln, with a stop-off along the way at Hawthorne, the town where Woody grew up.

Woody is ambiguously present throughout

the journey. Usually he seems more a husk than a man, nothing left in him but a magnetic attraction to the nearest barstool. But then suddenly there's a certain glimmer in his eyes, like a light popping on in a house that everybody thought had been abandoned. All of this teases at a Big Speech on the way, a moment where the fog will break and Woody will step into focus and speak for himself, a highlight-reel-stuffer and a petition for the Academy voters. But the Big Speech never comes. Woody's already on his way to becoming an ancestor. If anyone has the big scenes, it's David and Kate—while Woody's still alive, they're learning how to defend his memory.

When I speak to Dern on the phone a few hours before he's to present *Nebraska* at AFI Fest in Los Angeles and to be fêted by Quentin Tarantino, who directed him in *Django Unchained*, he still sounds like the Bruce Dern you know. He's a convivial raconteur, the memory of his 50-plus-year career clear as a bell, a library of anecdotes all within easy reach. Mostly, though, he wants to talk about *Nebraska*. When he first read the script, he says, he saw "the opportunity of a lifetime". Given the absence of a showpiece moment for Woody, I wonder what it is, exactly, that he saw.

"In my career," Dern says, "I've had a tendency to probably push a little bit too hard in the roles that I've played to make the roles stand out because they weren't the linchpin role of the movie. But what I saw in the *Nebraska* script was that I would have to do certain things: trust the material, trust the director and trust myself. Because of the lack of any one big scene, I had to believe in the totality

*The first day, Alexander Payne said to me: 'I want you to do us a favour in this movie, Bruce. Don't show us anything. Let us find it'*

of the story, that if you were willing to follow somebody with a camera, it would pay off. The first day of work, Alexander said to me, with Phedon Papamichael, the cameraman at his side, 'I want you to do us a favour in this movie, Bruce. Don't show us anything. Let us find it.'"

Payne has populated *Nebraska* with Midwesterners—such a chorus of nasal voices! Squibb, who played the wife of Jack Nicholson's character in Payne's *About Schmidt*, hails from southern Illinois, while Bob Odenkirk (*Mr. Show with Bob and David*, *Breaking Bad*), playing David's favoured elder brother, is from Naperville, outside Chicago. Dern is himself a Chicagoan, and therefore a Midwesterner, though he hails from a very different stratum than Woody Grant. He grew up in Winnetka, a wealthy area north of the city. His father was a well-to-do attorney, his father's father a governor of Utah and first secretary of war under Franklin D. Roosevelt, his great-uncle the poet Archibald MacLeish.

While Dern is a teetotaler whose lips have never touched alcohol, he nevertheless claims a deep connection with an old toper like Woody. "The second day... we're shooting in a little town called Hooper, Nebraska, about 880 people, and a lady comes up through the yellow tape around the set—yellow tape is homicide tape here in LA, so it always seemed like we were investigating a homicide instead of making a movie—this lady comes up and asks could she show me something. She walks me across the street and into the school and on the wall is a picture of my grandfather Dern in the first grade, and every other grade he went to there through the eighth grade, until he went to Salt Lake City and went to high school. I didn't know it until she took me there."

A homecoming of sorts, then. I mention a scene in *Nebraska* in which Woody revisits the shell of the old family farmstead where he was raised; entering his parents' bedroom triggers a sudden lucidity. "I'd get whipped if they found me in here," says Woody, adding: "I guess there's nobody to whip me now," his tone hovering somewhere between satisfaction and regret. "That's right out of my own life, incidentally," Dern adds, after reciting the lines from Bob Nelson's screenplay by heart. "Although I didn't get whipped, I got whipped verbally."

Alienated from his patrician family and its smothering expectations, Dern found an outlet in training as a marathon runner—he still runs every day. Attending his father's alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, Dern took to acting, dabbling in dramatic school before dropping out. "There were three goals," Dern says of his decision. "Go to New York, try and become a member of the Actor's Studio and work for Kazan." In short order, all three were accomplished. By the time Dern had made his debut in an uncredited part in *Wild River* (1960), he was one of five actors under contract to Elia Kazan, in the auspicious company of Pat Hingle, Rip Torn, Geraldine Page and Lee Remick. In the following years, Dern got some memorable film parts between



Family guys: Bruce Dern as Woody with Will Forte as his son David in *Nebraska*





BE NATIONAL ARCHIVE (C)

**Shooting star:** Dern's role in Walter Hill's *The Driver* (1978) ended a high-profile decade for the actor that included films with Hal Ashby and Bob Rafelson



television jobs – a bit as a sloshed sailor in a flashback in Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1965), for example – but Hollywood didn't immediately know what to do with that wheedling, prattling voice, that face that was slightly too pinched and rodentine to belong to a romantic lead, that peculiar air of hangdog menace.

In *Nebraska*, the famously loquacious Dern holds his silence, relying on the presence of Woody's absence. His sparse white hair has been whipped into a wispy bramble, which Papamichael frequently backlights for a halo effect, appropriate to a man who is half-ghost. Woody's first appearance shows off his stiff, splay-legged, bent-against-the-wind trudge, the determined march of a man sure that there's a pot of gold waiting for him somewhere over the rainbow. But because this is Alexander Payne's *Nebraska* and not Dorothy and Toto's *Kansas*, the world stays black and white until the very end.

The photography could be dismissed as a cliché of flatland starkness, a hand-me-down from *The Last Picture Show* and *In Cold Blood* and the sleeve of Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* LP – the poster for the movie even uses the same typeface. But Dern, who refers to Payne's struggle to get permission to shoot in monochrome as “the black-and-white battle”, explains that this isn't a matter of homage so much as practical necessity, of listening to and responding to what a place requires. “That's what it is – it is black and white out there!” he says. “You get 20 minutes away from Omaha and it's black and white! There's not a whole lot of colour out there. And yet the people stay. They don't leave because they believe what they've got is as good as it's gonna get for them. And who's to say they're wrong?”

Payne's choice of palette wasn't the only item of contention in his wishlist – there was also the matter of his lead actor, something less than a hot box-office property in recent years. “I don't know when the last time was I was in a studio movie,” says Dern, “but it wasn't this century, I'll tell you that.” Dern recalls starting his campaign for the role when he first heard of it almost 10 years ago, sending Payne a model truck from Toys “R” Us



Barbara Harris and Dern in *Family Plot*

*I don't know when the last time was I was in a studio movie, but it wasn't this century, I'll tell you that*

with a note reading: “I think I'm Woody.” Payne never lost sight of Dern through the decade that followed and, in exchange for this loyalty, the actor is immovably loyal to his director. “A lot of people I've read in the last five months say that sometimes Alexander has a tendency to pick on the subjects in his movies,” Dern says. “That's because they've not been out there and they've not met those people. Those are fair people, those are righteous people, they've got game and they're proud of who they are and where they are, and I think Alexander was very proud to put a guy like Woody on the screen. I don't think it's a talk-down. Any one of those people who's telling you it's a talk-down, just go to their Thanksgiving dinner, meet the people at their table, see what that's like.” (For my part, when people complain that Payne “talks down” to his Midwestern characters, it seems that they're really saying: “I would rather you not show me these people in the first place”. As a Midwesterner in good standing, I didn't find a single person or environment in *Nebraska* that wasn't instantly recognisable.)

Dern is now in the midst of a very long whistle-stop publicity campaign for *Nebraska*, for which he has been an inexhaustible cheerleader. This



Wendy Schaal and Dern in *The 'Burbs*

enthusiasm is not limited to his experience with Payne – when I mention Dern's small part in Joe Dante's *The Hole* (2009), a movie that received a desultory theatrical release in the US, the actor indignantly pipes up: “Now why didn't people get to go to see that? It's just ingenious stuff!” Dern goes on to recall that Dante, who also directed him in *The 'Burbs* (1989), “started at Roger Corman when I finished there. He was a freshman and I was a senior at the University of Corman.”

After Dern spent the early 1960s working principally in episodic TV, Corman cast the actor in his motorcycle gang picture *The Wild Angels* (1966) – a fleet of hogs on the highway in *Nebraska* recalls his biker past. Dern co-starred with his wife Diane Ladd and embarked on a career as a drive-in star for “a box lunch and \$350 a week”. His association with Corman ended with a perceived casting snub for a part in the hardly remembered *Von Richthofen and Brown* (1971). So began the actor's most high-profile and prolific decade, racking up credits for Douglas Trumbull (*Silent Running*, 1971), Bob Rafelson (*The King of Marvin Gardens*, 1972), John Frankenheimer (*Black Sunday*, 1976), Hal Ashby (*Coming Home*, 1978) and Walter Hill (*The Driver*, 1978).

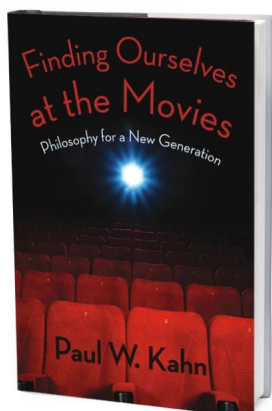
The great parts had become sparser when Dern first met Payne through his daughter with Ladd, Laura Dern, who starred in Payne's debut feature, *Citizen Ruth* (1996). With the voice of experience, Dern raves about the director's presence: “He's not just back looking at the monitor. Mr Hitchcock and Mr Kazan were the predominant factors on their set. On an Alexander Payne set, the movie is the predominant factor. The first day I worked for him he informed me he had 85 people on his crew and 47 of them had worked on every day of every movie he'd ever made. So it was a family.”

The sort of family Dern prefers – you get the sense he'd like to be at work when he finally keels over, and he loves wending his way back through his filmography. Payne is also deeply engaged with film history. When I visited him in 2011 at his home in Omaha, shortly before the release of *The Descendants*, we watched Imamura Shohei's *Pigs and Battleships* (1962) – he was presumably studying the black and white. I ask Dern if Payne kept after him for stories of the legends he'd worked with, and he demurs: “He thinks I have too many stories, like everybody else does.” This is the prefix to – what else? – a story, about a 75th anniversary celebration screening at Paramount where Dern met Joel McCrea. “He worked with Preston Sturges, with Sam Peckinpah!” says Dern, before excusing himself to receive plaudits, evidently content to have hung around long enough to elicit the same kind of reaction. ☺



Dern with his wife Diane Ladd in Roger Corman's *Wild Angels*





## Finding Ourselves at the Movies

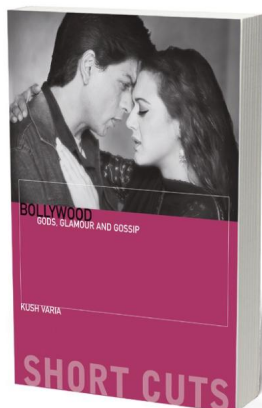
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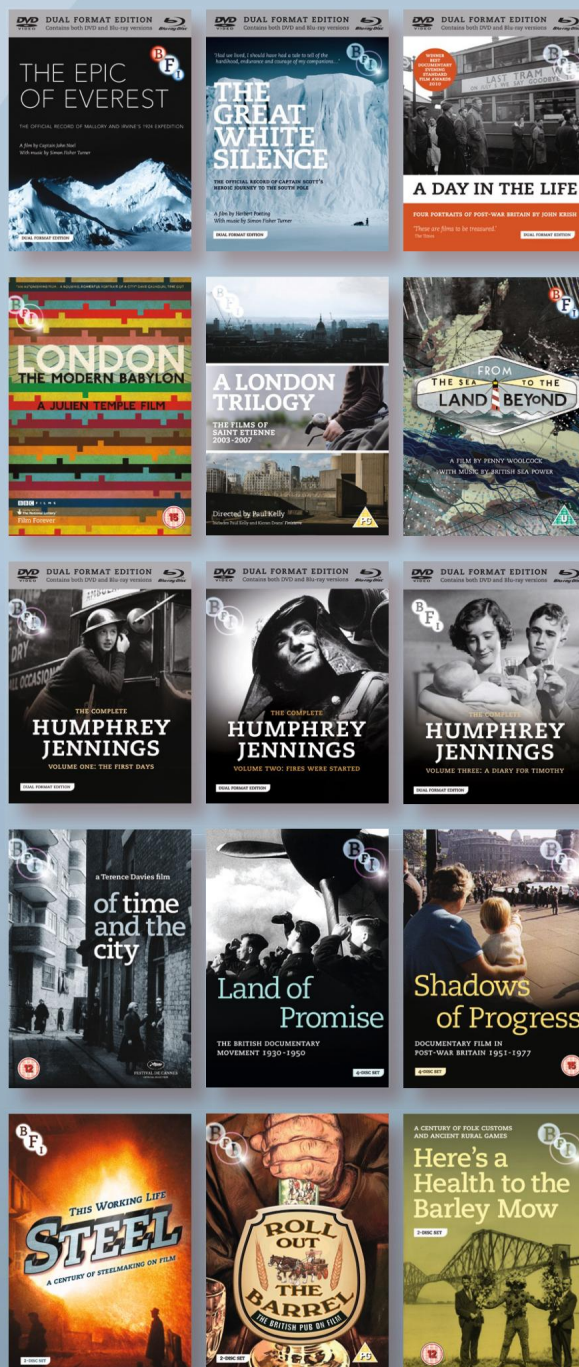
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PREVIEW

## IN REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Director and cinephile Peter von Bagh is a cultural institution in his native Finland but his work remains unjustly neglected abroad

By Olaf Möller

That Saturday afternoon in April the weather was pretty ugly even by Oulu standards. Still, the big, uninviting multiplex was packed with people looking forward to the world premiere of *Remembrance, A Small Movie About Oulu in the 1950s* (*Muisteja – Pieni elokuva 1950-luvun Oulusta*), the latest film by one of the city's greatest adopted sons, Peter von Bagh.

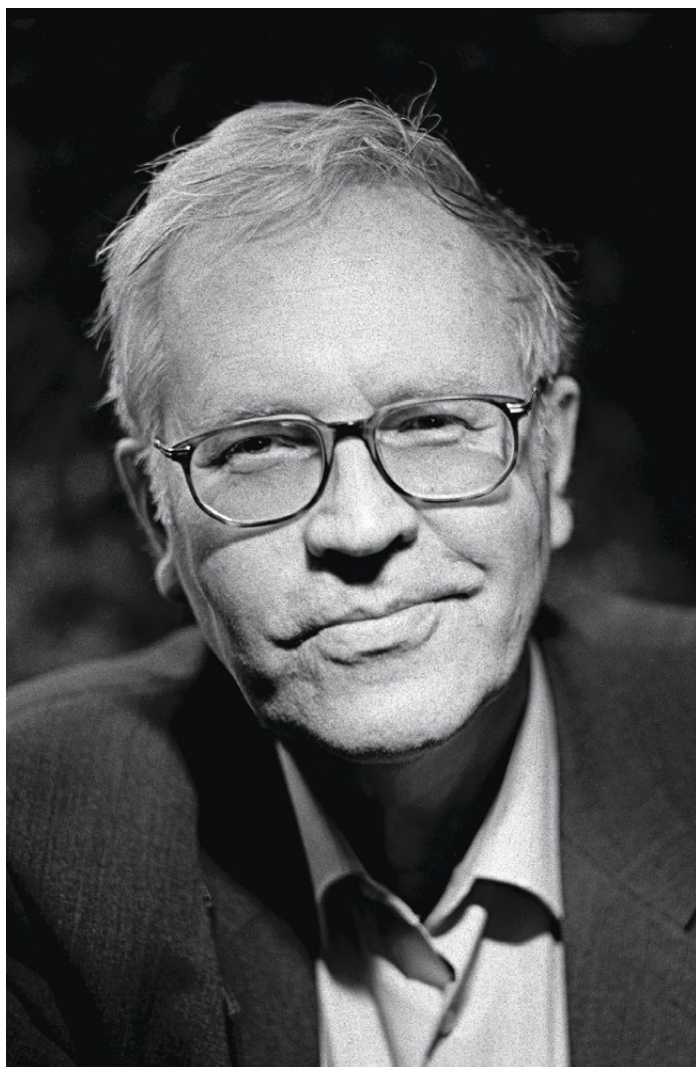
Quite a few of the senior attendees had gone to school with the director here in central Finland in an era when the nation was still recovering from World War II. The younger ones, meanwhile, had grown up with him on television and radio, where he introduced them to the classics of cinema, always sending them

off on their voyage of discovery with a casual “Antoisaa elokuvailtaa” (“Have a very enjoyable film night”). Everyone present probably owned at least one of his books because he was responsible for nearly every standard Finnish tome on international film history. He also wrote a host of major works on popular music and theatre, and published other authors. As a result, von Bagh is an institution in the cultural life of post-war Finland, a maker and shaper of manners and ideas, a dreamer and fighter, a pathfinder and path-breaker; a man of quick wit whose sarcastic quips are famous, and whose ire nobody in his right mind would want to provoke. He's also that rarest of creatures, a man of the people.

Four months later on another Saturday afternoon – an uncommonly beautiful one for mid-September – another smaller screening venue is packed: the Orion, the Finnish Audiovisual Archive's exquisite cinema in the heart of Helsinki. Up one block is the Corona Bar – whose status as the unofficial centre of the country's film culture is an open secret – and its

legendary annex, Cafe Mockba; the evenings to come will inevitably end here – albeit without von Bagh, who is being celebrated over this weekend after turning 70 on 29 August.

To honour the occasion, the Risto Jarva Society have organised a von Bagh symposium, which isn't just attended by old comrades from the 60s but by younger talents and celebrities too. This is not unexpected: as the co-founder and organiser of the Midnight Sun Film Festival, von Bagh has helped create a close-knit cinephile community. Going way up north to its venue in the tiny town of Sodankylä to watch films 24 hours a day for five days in a row has become a ritual in certain quarters of Finnish society. And Sodankylä is not like any other festival. By attending, one becomes part of a history, a link in a chain, in which the cinema of the past is a mighty presence, never oppressive, but cherished and accorded the respect it deserves. The Midnight Sun Film Festival is a commitment, nothing less. Laura Birn, one of Finland's major young actresses, came for years as a volunteer, and still returns



Man of the people: Peter von Bagh



*The Count* (1971)



*Olavi Virta* (1972)



to watch films and hang out; colleagues of hers, such as Ville Virtanen, make themselves useful as minders for some of the attending celebs.

The two days of von Bagh celebrations at the Orion were like an extension of Sodankylä, which itself feels like an extension of a past world one got a glimpse of in a home movie shot by Erkki Kurenniemi that was screened as part of the symposium. It shows a pleasantly rowdy 60s gathering populated by many of the people who would shape Finnish arts and public life in the decades to come. In the midst of it all is von Bagh.

To witness the von Bagh phenomenon at home is quite an experience for a foreigner like myself, although it doesn't come as a complete surprise for it's simply the more intimate, family-sized version of what one has come to know from abroad. If, in its best moments, Bologna's Il Cinema Ritrovato festival feels like an eight-day party with your favourite crowd, it's because of the way von Bagh, as the event's artistic director, runs the show. He keeps the sense of community and camaraderie alive, remaining ever-present, ever-accessible and ever-enthusiastic about what he's just seen, whether it's an old favourite that continues to get better with each viewing, or something new that has opened up unexpected horizons.

Then again, it is also painfully obvious how little he is known beyond the borders of the Finnish-speaking world: barely any of his writings have been translated, and until recently, almost none of his several dozen films were available with subtitles. Bewilderingly enough, the films were also barely appreciated back home. People knew von Bagh made documentaries but it seems they were looked upon mainly as an extension of his writings.

Von Bagh started out as a writer. As a schoolboy in Oulu he was already writing about cinema; he wasn't even of age then and may have written about things he shouldn't have seen in the first place (it would fit the legend). *Remembrance* suggests that the cinema was an escape for the thoroughly unhappy young Peter: because of his father's work they had to leave Helsinki, his birthplace, and move north, where he felt lost and utterly at odds with the world. Watching films was a way out. Cinema became a world he could explore and chart. It would also offer him a way to construct a sense of home for himself – his very own Finland. One could add here that part of von Bagh's family is St Petersburg-German and in an essentially provincial place like Oulu, this can make you even more of an outsider.

When von Bagh returned to Helsinki for his studies, he soon became part of the circle around Risto Jarva, arguably the most influential auteur of Finland's New Wave. Back then, Jarva had yet to make his feature debut, but when he and Jaakko Pakkasvirta finally made *Night or Day* (*Yö vai päivä*, 1962), guess who can be spotted in the back of one scene.

By the late 1960s and early 70s, von Bagh was an acknowledged author of books on the cinema, but he also wrote several screenplays for both Jarva and Pakkasvirta. He also made his first shorts, which form something of a link between the tiny universe of Helsinki underground cinema and the wider Finnish new wave establishment.



Wonderful town: *Remembrance: A Small Movie About Oulu in the 1950s* (2013)

The year 1971 saw the release of *The Count* (*Kreivi*), his first feature film and his lone stab at fiction – or kind of. I say that because the protagonist, Pertti Ylermi Lindgren, plays himself, a notorious swindler who proposed to more than 70 women and took money from each of them without ever following through with the marriage. Von Bagh recreates four of his most infamous deceptions, with the conman and the actresses having a lot of fun; in between, he shows scenes from Lindgren's life at the time the film was made, revealing how he was getting by as an entertainer. *The Count* became a major scandal: the burghers felt insulted – rightly, as the film is certainly a satire about bourgeois mores. It's also a film about a culture of pretence and pretensions, of life as performance and performance as a way of life – pure anarchy. It fits that von Bagh would always feel close to the misfits of Finland's culture, the bad boys and girls who'd take the piss out of everything sacred and wreak havoc whenever possible.

With his next film, *Olavi Virta* (1972), a short TV documentary about probably the most celebrated of all Finnish singers, he almost destroyed his directing career. Again, polite society threw tantrums: how could he dare to show the great man in such a light – impoverished and ill, mainly as a result of serious alcohol abuse. Von Bagh's film jumps back and forth between an interview he did with Virta and archive footage showing the Finland that had loved Virta so much, usually set to his tunes. It's very simple and very effective because it asks plenty of questions, the most important ones being: what has become

of us? Where has that world gone? Is this what is left of the welfare state? Is this how we deal with our history – by letting it rot away?

Questions such as these would prove to be the motor of von Bagh's work to come. After half a dozen years of enforced silence (he kept himself busy by running the Finnish Film Archive as well as his magazine *Filmihullu*), von Bagh returned to filmmaking, and stayed with it. Almost all of his works, with few exceptions, are essayistic montage films about Finnish history made principally for television. Film by film, von Bagh went on constructing his personal vision of Finland. He looks back at a past most people have already forgotten or no longer care about – the cinema of Finland's studio era, the popular music culture of the 40s, 50s and 60s, the nation's decisive moments, to mention just a few of the subjects he returns to time and again. Each of them is an act of remembrance – in defiance of a culture run by fads and fashions, a culture not of careful development but crude and blind 'progress'.

If one sees just one or two of von Bagh's works – recent titles include the four episodes of *Sodankylä Forever*, 2010, and the three episodes of *The Story of Mikko Niskanen* 2010-2011 – one is likely to be struck by their directorial excellence, the sharpness of their editing, their exquisite sense of pace and the extraordinary beauty (in the later works) of the voiceovers; if one starts studying his films for real, one will quickly begin to appreciate how personal these films are, how certain scenes appear again and again across decades and subjects, suggesting that they have an almost totemic quality for the director. Von Bagh's cinema constitutes one of the grandest and most moving examples of Benjamin's notion of 'revolutionary nostalgia'. There's a lot to be learned from *Remembrance* and everything that preceded it. Whichever von Bagh film one comes across first is as good a point of departure as any. 📺

*Von Bagh's films look back to a past most people have already forgotten about... in defiance of a culture run by fads and fashions*



# GRRRLS ON FILM

The music and feminist anger of the artists associated with the riot grrrl movement lives on in a series of DIY movies

**By Frances Morgan**

*The Punk Singer*, Sini Anderson's documentary about musician and feminist activist Kathleen Hanna, screened as part of London Film Festival's 'Sonic' programme this autumn (alongside another, fictional account of young women playing punk rock, Lukas Moodysson's *We Are the Best*). Riot grrrl – the North American political and musical movement with roots in the Pacific North West, with which Hanna is indelibly associated – is one of a number of 1980s and 90s musical subcultures documented on film in recent years, from low-budget efforts such as *American Hardcore*, based on Steve Blush's book about US hardcore punk, to Ice-T's 2012 opus *The Art of Rap*. Unlike those histories, however, there's little sense of a musical trajectory from underground to mainstream when talking about bands such as Hanna's first group Bikini Kill. Instead, music is a catalyst, the most immediate vehicle for a third-wave feminist ethos expressed not only in songs but also fanzines, art, film and video.

*The Punk Singer* and other documentaries such as Abby Moser's *Grrrl Love and Revolution: Riot Grrrl NYC* and Amy Oden's *From the Back of the Room* (both 2011) perform a useful function in historicising and solidifying women's roles in musical undergrounds; *From the Back of the Room*, in particular, diverges from the relatively concise, location-specific, media-friendly story of early-90s riot grrrl with its articulate participants and manifestos, contextualising the movement within women's involvement in DIY music more generally. But documentaries consisting of gig footage and talking heads aren't the only way this burst of energy should be remembered on film. None of riot grrrl's key figures fit into the format of a rock hagiography. With artists such as Hanna – a photography student – writers Allison Wolfe, Tobi Vail and Molly Neuman and prodigious filmmaker Sadie Benning (daughter of James), as well as more peripheral supporters such as Jennifer Reeves and Miranda July, this was an intensely media-literate milieu whose visual activities extended into experimental feminist filmmaking, part of a lineage that arguably started with artists such as Carolee Schneemann, Barbara Hammer and Martha Rosler in the 1960s and 70s. In 1994, Jill Reiter cast Kathleen Hanna in an unfinished, fragmentary feature, *In Search of Margo-go*, about a young woman looking for Margot Olaverria, bassist with 80s new wave group the Go-Gos. Also involved in that film was Sarah Jacobson, whose own feature *Mary Jane's Not A Virgin Anymore* became an underground hit in 1997.

Made when Jacobson was still in her mid-twenties, *Mary Jane* is a tender, funny, gawky film with little of the rage of her 1993 short, *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*; it's less insular artist's film than adjunct to or dialogue with the grunge-lite indie romances of the era. It is also that rare thing, a coming-of-age film that feels entirely uncynical.



**Punk's not dead: *The Punk Singer* tells the story of musician and feminist activist Kathleen Hanna**

The story of an 18-year-old girl exploring sex and relationships with the help of her workmates in an arthouse cinema, it exploits neither its subjects nor their subculture. The film's music, much of which is diegetic, rarely provides an opportunity for music-video-style emotional set pieces; instead, it's part of the fabric of the characters' lives, cued up rapidly at parties and on car stereos and discussed in passing. It helps that the music's so well chosen: within the first ten minutes, you hear AFI's 'Cruise Control', Mudhoney's 'Flat Out Fucked' and 'Quick Mechanic' by pop-punk band The Loudmouths, whose Beth Ramona Allen appears as Mary Jane's musician friend Ericka, a kind, tough-talking bisexual girl with flames tattooed up her arms.



***I Was a Teenage Serial Killer***

*The music is a catalyst, the most immediate vehicle for a third-wave feminist ethos also expressed in art, film and video*

We first see her casually recounting tales of tour debauchery; later, she reassures the inexperienced Mary Jane by telling her how she wrote a song about losing her virginity called 'Lame Fuck'. "Those were the worst two minutes of my life," she sings. A party scene (Amebix posters on the walls, girls in striped tights doing bong hits) is soundtracked almost exclusively with female voices, though not the better known riot grrrl groups: here you get the garage-punk of Red Aunts and the rasp and yawp of Kat Bjelland's Babes In Toyland. Extreme music is part of young women's everyday experience; it doesn't need to be framed in a particular politics to be so.

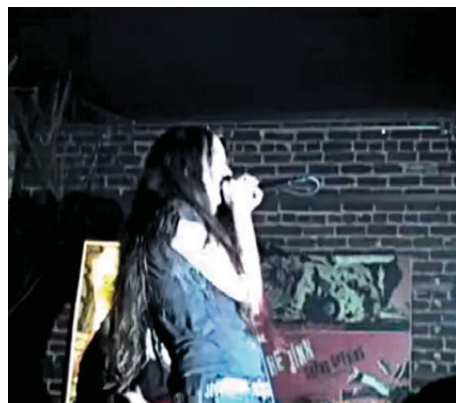
*Mary Jane's Not A Virgin Anymore* is a valuable sidenote to the recent documentaries on riot grrrl because, as fiction, it shows this particular musical and political subculture as a continuum, a strand running through young people's lives, not a discrete movement you could join or leave or put a label on. The film's male characters are sympathetic too: not only shy, straight-edge skater Ryan and gay cinema boss Dave but beer-chugging Matt and Steve, too, are refugees from mainstream society (represented by Mary Jane's awful college friends and a cameo by



Jello Biafra as a puritanical evangelist). What ties it the most to its political moment is the commitment to speaking out: Mary Jane, Ericka and another friend, Grace, all speak with a slightly formal, didactic tone concerning rape, drug use, unplanned pregnancy and masturbation, passages that threaten to disrupt the jokey flow of the film. But this aspect of *Mary Jane*, which is overall a sunny, optimistic movie, has travelled remarkably well, its earnestness a breath of fresh air almost two decades later, as well as being a corrective to the idea that riot grrrl's concerns were purely theoretical or aesthetic, unconnected to young women's real lives.

It is also what links the film to *I Was A Teenage Serial Killer*. Despite a John Waters-like dark humour, this lo-fi female revenge film, made just after Jacobson finished her studies with George Kuchar, aches with damage and ugliness, as Kristin Calabrese offs various men, including her drunk, ranting father and, at the end of the film, reveals her background of abuse – the story she has never been able to tell and has instead subsumed into violence. This move to testify, especially to experiences of sexual assault, is one of the essential but now less acknowledged elements of riot grrrl. The film's music is brief but haunting: first, a female voice raps over the chorus of Cypress Hill's 'How I Could Just Kill a Man'; then the music on Calabrese's car stereo is Charles Manson's 'Eyes of a Dreamer'. The song that ends the film, the searing 'My Secret' by Olympia band Heavens to Betsy, encapsulates the relationship between the underground music and film of the time. The 1992 single by Sleater-Kinney guitarist Corin Tucker's first band is a confessional and an invective, detailing childhood sexual abuse and adult rage with visceral clarity. "These words are a threat to you," chants Tucker. "My secret is... I want you dead, I want you dead, I want you dead..."

The neutering of punk rock into a series of nostalgically rebellious poses in film means that gestures like this are often forgotten, although Jacobson herself is not. She died from cancer in 2004 aged 32, with a film about the making of Lou Adler's 1982 film *Ladies And Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains* in the works. A foundation set up in her name now supports independent female filmmakers in the US. *Mary Jane* is still viewed as something of a landmark in 90s DIY filmmaking but in true underground style is only available to watch on YouTube. ☹



From the Back of the Room

## PRIMAL SCREEN FESTIVE SPIRITS

The tradition of telling ghost stories at Christmas has haunted cinema almost since the birth of film itself



By Bryony Dixon

Christmas, so they say, comes earlier every year – so early these days that it's in danger of backing into Halloween. In film terms this has already occurred with Tim Burton's *The Nightmare before Christmas* (1993), in which ghoulish Halloween characters plot to conquer Christmas. Of course, the two winter festivals share some territory, which we could broadly call gothic; the Christmas tradition of telling ghost stories – a little chill to be enjoyed in good company by a cosy fire – overlaps with similar traditions that have become attached to Halloween (think of *The Simpsons*' 'Treehouse of Horror' Halloween specials in which Bart, with upturned torch for extra spookiness, recites Poe). Will the two winter festivals ultimately merge? In the world of the family film, Halloween and Christmas are already part of one long wintry season. But this is no recent phenomenon – the Christmas/ghost story link starts earlier in film than you might think.

The first surviving Christmas film seems to be *Santa Claus*, made by G. A. Smith in 1898. It's a classic Victorian tale inherited from the magic lantern, of two children in a nice middle-class house being put to bed and dreaming of Santa delivering toys. The interesting thing from a film point of view is the *mise en scène*, which shows Santa, a benign supernatural figure, on the snowy rooftops in a circular vignette superimposed on a black area within the bedroom where the children lie sleeping. He then appears, as if real, from the fireplace, having descended the chimney to distribute toys and a great Christmas tree. This simple film not only pioneers a form of parallel action editing but also usefully illustrates that there was a market for Christmas films from the very early days of cinema – as well as for films targeted specifically at children. Méliès elaborated on Smith's film for his *La Rêve de Noël* in 1901.

Christmas stories make a regular appearance in the November/December release schedules soon after, on Christmassy themes such as pantomime comedies and with the first adaptation of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*: R. W. Paul's *Scrooge, or, Marley's Ghost* (1901). The story classically contrasts Christmas as a time of joy and abundance with gothic imagery of ghostly messengers, child poverty and tombstones.

Poignant stories of children freezing in the snow on Christmas eve in this era derive from Hans Christian Andersen's 'Little Match Girl' of 1845 in which a poor girl, using up her last matches to try to stop herself from freezing, sees a series of visions in the flames. James Williamson's *The Little R.W. Paul's 'Scrooge' contrasts Christmas as a time of joy with gothic images of tombstones*



G.A Smith's 1898 *Santa Claus*



Percy Stow's 1904 *The Mistletoe Bough*

*Match Seller*, which appears in his December catalogue for 1902, again employs the trick of superimposing images as she strikes each match, showing her a series of visions – a fire, food, a Christmas tree and her mother – before an angel leads her soul out of her body to heaven. G. A. Smith's *The Death of Poor Joe* (1899), based on a scene from *Bleak House*, has a grim graveyard setting and shares this theme of the friendless child on winter nights in the season of goodwill and plenty.

We can take the Christmas tradition of telling ghost stories even further back, with pieces such as the legend of the Mistletoe Bough, based on an 18th century Italian story first written down in 1823. By the 1850s it was regularly sung or recited at Christmas gatherings, making it on to film for the first of many times in 1904 as *The Mistletoe Bough*. Made by Percy Stow for the Clarendon Company, the film tells the story of a Christmas wedding and a game of hide-and-seek during which the bride hides in a great oak chest and is trapped. Three decades later she appears to the husband as a ghost, and the withered skeleton, still in its bridal clothes, is finally discovered. The film was advertised, with the lyrics of the ballad, in the Gaumont Christmas catalogue of that year.

Coincidentally, it was also 1823 that Clement Clarke Moore's famous and more joyful Christmas poem, 'A Visit from St Nicholas' – now better known as 'Twas the Night before Christmas' – first appeared. This poem can be said to have invented the modern Santa Claus and inspired the ironic title of the Tim Burton film. As with other themes, early film is a cultural way station, here en route to the modern Christmas film. ☹



## ARTMOREORLESS



Up against the wall: *Instant Mural* (1974) borrows from and parodies the tradition of murals in Mexican art

The work of LA art collective Asco shows that truly effective protest must include a vision of the future as well as a critique of the present

By John Beagles

In their carnivalesque street performances, media hoaxes and multimedia works of the 1970s and 80s, the Chicano art collective Asco deployed a sharp, humorous and engaging form of tactical inventiveness to deal with the nausea and repulsion – ‘Asco’ is the Spanish word for disgust – they felt on being confronted by racist America, the cool liberal indifference of the art world and the conservatism of their own Chicano community. Nottingham Contemporary gallery’s retrospective overview of what Asco referred to as “artmoreorless”, is both timely and highly relevant, as Asco’s legacy is ripe with possibilities for today’s artist similarly looking to counteract the untrammelled exercise of power in society.

The core members of Asco – Harry Gamboa Jr, Patssi Valdez, Gronk and Willie F. Herrón III – came together as teenagers in the turmoil of late 60s America. As East Los Angeles Chicanos, Mexicans who had grown up in America, their experiences were highly distinctive. Bearing witness to the disproportionate singling out

of Mexicans for the Vietnam draft, the sight of their friends returning in body bags and the elite political class’s apathy to their plight scarred all the members. It bred in them a core, fervent desire to imagine and create, as Gamboa Jr remarks, “a better story out of nothing”.

Walking the streets of East LA, their feelings of disgust were only intensified by being in spitting distance of the Hollywood sign. This proximity to the industry responsible for disseminating negative stereotypes of Mexicans or simply naturalising their social and political invisibility was profound. As Valdez recalls in the show’s accompanying documentary, she was always confused and angry as a girl watching movies, because she never saw the beautiful Mexicans she knew on screen. Crucially then, the geographical location of Asco members furnished them with a lived understanding of the imbrication of cultural representations and ideology.

The word ‘Asco’, in its invocation of being repulsed by the brutality of America society, could suggest that the group’s politicised aesthetic was rather one-dimensional in negatively reacting against the values of white America. While this was clearly the source of the anger that propelled the group, however, their position in relation to both the wider values and culture of America and their own Mexican community in East LA was always far more complex. For although they

primarily contested the naturalised exclusion of Mexicans, they also found themselves on another level somewhat alienated from their own culture.

This sense of being doubly dislocated is exemplified in their early performances, such as *Walking Mural* (1972) and *Instant Mural* (1974). In these carnivalesque street interventions Asco both parodied and borrowed from the Mexican mural tradition. For example, in *Walking Mural* the group, dressed in glam feather boas and heavily made up with face paint, took the fixed mural on a walk about town; while in *Instant Mural*, Valdez became a living-moving mural as a result of being taped to the wall of a building.

While Mexican mural work often traded in affirmative images of working-class authenticity (variously depicted in works by Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros), Asco’s embodied murals, in their exuberant excessiveness, purposefully undercut any indigenous or external ideas of how a good Mexican should look or behave. In rejecting the mural tradition’s jargon of authenticity and nationalist identity – the honest farmer, the good mother – Asco were suggesting that such images could be almost as restrictive as Hollywood stereotypes. Always unapologetic, self-proclaimed cultural mongrels who enjoyed borrowing from a wide range of sources, Asco regarded the mural tradition as being guilty of imposing an insipid cultural straitjacket with which the Mexican



community effectively kept itself in its place. Not surprisingly, Asco's irreverent parodies of mural art were regarded with suspicion by the Mexican community of East LA.

If alienating themselves from their natural community was problematic, succeeding in alienating the contemporary art world was positively heroic. Initially Asco managed to do this through direct action. Responding to being told by curators at the Museum of Contemporary Art in LA that they didn't show Chicano artists, the group nocturnally spray-painted their names onto the museum walls, effectively turning the building into an artwork that externally made visible the invisibility of Chicano artists inside.

Asco also made a series of works that conceptually wrong-footed the arts establishment by virtue of their apparently unstable aesthetic and conceptual tone. In the 'No Movies' ('cinema by other means') works, the group took photographs of themselves performing a succession of roles in 'fake' movies. In 1974's *In the Gore*, for example, Asco members playfully pose for a still from a low-budget, trash-glam horror sci-fi. Valdez, in space helmet and sparkly top, stands over a businessman, wielding what is clearly a plastic gold axe. These publicity shots were then distributed to individuals and disseminated via the media, emblazoned with the stamp 'Chicano Cinema/Asco'. This use of media networks via a proto-viral 'meme' campaign to create a myth around the group was highly prescient and successful – their 'lies' succeeded in creating a media buzz around this underground movement. Here Asco made full use of the one form of power the powerless always have – the power to lie.

On one level then the 'No Movies' stills and viral campaign operated as an imaginative projection of an as-yet unrealised (crucially not unrealisable) dream, namely a Chicano film movement complete with Chicano film stars. Clearly the works' politics are in part directed at Hollywood and the invisibility of Chicanos within the image factory. But as the film scholar David E. James noted in *October* magazine, 'No Movies' also "dialectically articulates both the affection and the anger, the desire and the hatred" Asco members felt for mainstream Hollywood. All the 'No Movies' images have this paradoxical tone, a refusal to deny the seductive allure Asco members felt for Hollywood's fantasy images of glamour. For the art community of LA this was troubling – the art world orthodoxy at the time was either to encourage suspicion of the Hollywood dream factory in critically deconstructive images, or by not doing so, to bring suspicion upon yourself. Being seen to be seduced smacked of complicity – a fateful loss of critical distance and agency.

As a result of foregrounding their delight in artifice, Asco's 'No Movies' images often get bracketed today with Cindy Sherman's similar early images of enthusiastic masquerade. The comparison is productive, when one considers how Sherman was also lambasted early in her career for not adopting a clear critical position. In Asco's case, one suspects this was partly the expression of a prejudice that this wasn't how a marginalised group should be seen to be behaving – clearly the sight of them having fun, of enjoying the masquerade, was deemed inappropriate and

## *Asco understood that to respond effectively to their times, they had to develop new vocabularies and new ways of thinking*

the chastising was a further attempt to fix their identity. But having fun was always important for Asco. Firstly because refusing to be seen to be ground down, refusing to have the smile wiped off your face by Hollywood power, was, as Freud said, an expression of "the invulnerability of the ego". Secondly it was a subversive act of recolonisation of Hollywood. The insouciance in Valdez's stare is key to this. In all the 'No Movies' images Valdez's eyes tell you there's another way, one that moves beyond stagnant binary modes of critical engagement with Hollywood. In pieces such as *A la mode* (1976), or the photo depicting the 'No Movies' award (a gold-painted plastic cobra), Asco advocated not merely appropriating the material forms of popular culture, but adopting the aesthetic forms of communication used by the industries of Hollywood. In effect they suggest popularising a counter-narrative of being, through the seductive power and glamour used by Hollywood. Just as some feminists during this period talked about the "the revolutionary power of women's laughter", so Asco knew that protest against a brutalising, alienating culture that impoverishes, can only be galvanising if it offers a seductive, imaginative, playful alternative – a better story. It has to appear enjoyable if you want people to join you.

Recently, in an essay in *Radical Philosophy* entitled 'Greek anti-fascism protests put the left's impotence on display', the philosopher Alain Badiou discussed how the widespread failure of the left stemmed from an inability or refusal to move beyond a reactive negation of neoliberal values, to one in which they were engaged in the creation of a popular, imaginative, seductive alternative vision. Badiou should have seen the Asco show, or

perhaps – though it's harder to imagine him doing it – read David Peace's magnificent book *Red or Dead* about Liverpool football manager Bill Shankly. In the book Peace charts how, through hard work and the broadcasting of an imaginative, popular rhetoric, Shankly's team succeeded in mobilising an army of supporters with a galvanising vision that produced 'a better tomorrow'. Crucially, while Shankly was someone who believed in the ethics of socialist collective action, he wasn't frightened of, and understood the intrinsic necessity for – as Slavoj Žižek puts it – grasping "the nettle of power".

Looking at this show, it's clear everyone in Asco understood the necessity of grasping the nettle of power. They also understood that in order to respond effectively to their times, they had to develop new vocabularies, new alliances and new ways of thinking. Creating a structure for their distinctive identities to flourish within the group dynamic, and their promiscuous use of disparate materials in their art, was one way they did this. Another was their conceptual, aesthetic methodology – its disruptive character, its elision of pleasure with politics, its determination to disturb lazy, staid notions *wherever* they found them. Asco's lessons for today's largely homogenous, academic, mannerist and apolitical art world are legion in this respect.

Forty years on, I was wholly, unashamedly seduced by this live resurrection. The combined affect of the style, irreverence and intelligence of Asco's rebellion did succeed in communicating to me that for protest to be genuinely liberating it can't just be a negatively defined act of opposition, it has to contain the promise of something better – a different kind of dream of tomorrow. Watching the documentary, it is clear just how much joy Asco members experienced through their protest. Patently it was, and has remained, empowering – a source of real pride. To borrow a phrase from art collective Free, clearly Asco were, and remain proof that, "protest is beautiful".

**i The exhibition 'Asco: No Movies' is at Nottingham Contemporary until 5 January**



**Axe to grind: In the Gore (1974) sees Asco members pose for a fake low-budget horror movie**



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of force, intelligence and  
terrible beauty"**

Nigel Andrews, THE FINANCIAL TIMES



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Manohla Dargis, THE NEW YORK TIMES

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Rex Reed, THE NEW YORK OBSERVER

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★★★★★  
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Alexander Skarsgård  
Onata Aprile  
Joanna Vanderham  
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MARK ADAMS, SUNDAY MIRROR

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The New York Observer

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**LE WEEK-END**  
(THE WEEKEND)

WRITTEN BY HANIF KUREISHI  
DIRECTED BY ROGER MICHELL

★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★  
★★★★★

15 15

### LE WEEK-END

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Nigel Andrews, Financial Times

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# Reviews



## 71 **The Butler**

*No clichéd path marker is left unchecked in Lee Daniels's fictionalised biography of Eugene Allen. His White House butler is the civil-rights movement's Forrest Gump, bearing witness to social upheaval but staying numbly, patiently, above the fray*



**64** Films of the month



**70** Films



**94** Home Cinema



**104** Books





**Marriage material:** Hadas Yaron as Shira in Rama Burshtein's Austen-inspired *Fill the Void*

## Fill the Void

Israel/USA 2012

Director: Rama Burshtein

Certificate U 90m 35s

**Reviewed by Jonathan Romney**

**Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist**

In his 2011 novel *The Marriage Plot*, Jeffrey Eugenides mused on the state of fiction in an era when marital intrigue has long fallen into disrepute as a narrative motor. Mainstream cinema still tries to make what it can of the drive towards marriage, but outside generic romcom it's hard to imagine what kind of fictions might be built unproblematically on such a framework today.

*Fill the Void* is an unexpected answer to that question. It's set within an orthodox Jewish community in Tel Aviv – Haredi rather than Hasidic, the latter being a subset of the former. And it's written and directed by a member of that community – although the fact that Rama Burshtein did not grow up within it but became Orthodox in her twenties, gives her a hybrid insider-outsider status. Her film follows the vagaries of a young woman's wedding plans – plans made for her by her parents with a community marital broker. If *Fill the Void* resembles anything in familiar fiction, it's the

novels of Jane Austen – an inspiration that Burshtein has cited in interviews. Indeed, the Orthodox codes of separation between the sexes, and the roles of mothers and aunts in facilitating meetings, closely echo the codes of decorum at Austen's balls and teatime visits.

The topic of arranged marriage is increasingly contentious today, whatever the religious or

ethnic context, so it comes as something of a shock that this urbane, intelligent film offers a defence of the practice. Burshtein depicts Haredi wedding tradition as cementing social order and offering a genuine possibility of happiness. It's missing the point to complain that *Fill the Void* is conservative; the terms of its argument are so far outside familiar western social norms



**Looking for Mr Right:** Shira with Yochay (Yiftach Klein)





*The terms of its argument are so far outside western social norms that the film registers as altogether radical in its gentle, elegantly expressed otherness*

Rivka makes a call to locate the elusive youth ("He's in the dairy section"). When he is spotted, gauche and bespectacled, Rivka announces, "He looks just like his father" – leaving it to us to decide whether this is a good thing or not.

But there's a twist to Burshtein's take on marriage. For despite this ostensibly being a film about marrying the *correct* person in social terms, it turns out also to be a romantic drama in a more familiar sense. In Shira's case, it's about marrying the *right* person, the one who will make the ideal fit – which may mean romantic/erotic love after all. It's never suggested that Haredi women are obliged to accept the decisions of parents or rabbis: women are under pressure to make their choices at the right time, but the decision of whom to marry is theirs.

Besides, Burshtein's deck is a little stacked: not only is widower Yochay the best-looking man around, he's also established as a tender soul with a seductive streak. There's clearly an emotional, even erotic bond simmering between him and Shira. The fact that he was earlier seen declaring passionate devotion to Shira's older sister is simply one of those challenging elements that Burshtein requires non-Haredi viewers to deal with. Burshtein doesn't make it easy for us: she wants us to be struck by the otherness of this community's norms.

*Fill the Void* certainly has a singular status among screen representations of Jewish life, which most commonly – whether secular or religious, made by Jews or gentiles – emphasise the 'vibrancy' of Jewish family life (in other words, lots of shouting). Burshtein gives us possibly the quietest Jews ever filmed, who live thoughtfully and often speak sotto voce. Parents and spouses alike are gently solicitous: when a distraught Rivka tells her husband that she's losing her mind, he calmly replies, "Lose your mind, I'm here."

Burshtein is interested in the conflicts of the situation – the film's one heated confrontation

comes when Rivka and Aunt Hanna disagree about Frieda – but generally, empathy and mutual support are key. Patriarchs have a special role in minimising discord. At a Purim meal, Shira's father hands out subsidies to a succession of men with griefs that require finance; in a comic interlude, a senior rabbi interrupts a meeting to explain the workings of an oven to an elderly woman.

We're far from the Coens' *A Serious Man* (2009), with its comic image of the ancient rabbi as earthly embodiment of a forbidding God. Theologically, the film is about Shira's personal relation with a nurturing deity. A rabbi quotes the text "Blessed be he who says one word of truth to the Almighty" – the suggestion is that Shira is blessed because she is courageous enough to address the truth about her world and her desires. Seeking to reconcile social requirements with her needs and desires, she is a person of integrity, an exemplary Austenian heroine – a Serious Woman.

Burshtein may appear to present a society in which women are fated to lose their liberty to a patriarchal order, but she makes it clear that her female characters consciously and freely assume their situation. As opposed to the bleak view of sexual subjugation in *Kadosh*, Amos Gitai's 1999 film about Hasidic marriage, *Fill the Void* sees Burshtein forthrightly and wittily asserting that this is how her community lives.

The film is finely acted, especially by Irit Sheleg as Rivka, a watchful social and familial politician. The command of emotional quietness is subtly achieved throughout, the introverted Shira (Hadas Yaron) tending to express herself through melancholy accordion-playing rather than words. Not that the film is unquestioning. The loose thread is disabled Aunt Hanna, who wears the traditional headdress of married women despite remaining single: a rabbi advised her that it would stop people asking questions. So one of the drama's strongest characters is a semi-excluded figure who guarantees herself a social place by living a lie of sorts.

Then there's the coda, with the newly married Shira and Yochay coming home together for the first time; the film leaves us with Shira looking decidedly anxious, as if to remind us that the traditional Austenian 'marriage plot' can only ever be a prelude to the real and complex drama of conjugal life. 📺

that the film registers as altogether radical in its gentle, elegantly expressed otherness. To establish this hermetic social world, largely restricted to interiors, Burshtein and DP Asaf Sudri create a distinctive and seductive visual style that emphasises intimacy: shallow focus, low angles, highly composed groupings.

The key theme is the formalised engineering of marriage: at the start, 18-year-old Shira visits a supermarket to get a first glimpse from afar of a possible husband. Matrimony is organised by a marriage broker who eventually – in a *deus ex machina* twist that resolves everyone's problems – himself marries Frieda, the one young woman in the community whose enduring single status has been the narrative's chief element of blockage.

This blockage can only be removed by pairing Frieda with the elderly Shtreicher, hardly the dashing swain of every young girl's dreams – but then romantic love and sexual attraction are not paramount in this community's worldview. The very fact of marriage is presented as a source of joy. Just as Frieda is visibly delighted to get together with Shtreicher, so at the start Shira glows at the prospect of union with the solemn youth who's been chosen for her. Such alliances and their management are represented with a certain ironic wit. The film's wonderfully eccentric opening close-up has Shira and her mother Rivka holding a nervous vigil in the supermarket, before

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Assaf Amir  
**Written by**  
Rama Burshtein  
**Cinematographer**  
Asaf Sudri  
**Editor**  
Sharon Elovic  
**Art Director**  
Ori Aminov  
**Music Composed by**  
Yitzhak Azulay  
**Sound Recordist**  
Moti Hefetz  
**Costume Designer**  
Chani Gurewitz

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Production Ltd  
**Production Companies**  
Norma Productions presents  
Produced with the support of Israel Film Fund, Ministry of Science, Culture and Sports, Israel Film Council, Reshet, HOT, Avi Chai Foundation, Sundance Institute  
Developed with

the assistance of Sundance Institute Feature Film Program  
With additional support from Sundance Institute Annenberg Film Fellowship and Cinereach Feature Film Fellowship.  
Israel Fund for Film Production  
Developed with the support of Rabinovich Foundation for the Arts – Cinema Project

**Cast**  
Hadas Yaron  
Shira  
Yiftach Klein  
Yochay  
Irit Sheleg  
Rivka  
Chaim Sharir  
Aharon  
Razia Israely  
Aunt Hanna  
Hila Feldman  
Frieda  
Renana Raz  
Esther

Yael Tal  
Shifi  
Michael David Weigl  
Shtreicher  
Ido Samuel  
Yossi  
Neta Moran  
Bilha  
Michael Thal  
rabbi  
  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles  
  
Distributor

Artificial Eye Film Company

8,152 ft +8 frames

Israeli theatrical title  
Lemale et ha'hail

Tel Aviv, the present. Shira, 18-year-old daughter of Rabbi Aharon, is accompanied by her mother Rivka to glimpse a prospective young husband from their Haredi Jewish community. Excited at the prospect of marriage, Shira shares her joy with her pregnant older sister Esther and Esther's husband Yochay. Following a meal celebrating the festival of Purim, Esther dies giving birth to a son, Mordechai. Soon afterwards, it is announced that plans are afoot for Yochay to remarry,

which will mean him moving to Belgium with Mordechai. Rivka suggests that he might marry Shira instead. Shira has qualms, then learns that her putative in-laws have called off the marriage to their son. Shira and Yochay meet, but Shira tells him that Esther would have wanted him to marry her single friend Frieda – an option endorsed by Shira's aunt Hanna. Instead, Frieda weds marriage broker Streicher. Following a family meeting overseen by a senior rabbi, Shira and Yochay marry.



# Her

Director: Spike Jonze

## Reviewed by Nick James

See feature  
on page 20

Spike Jonze's new vision of the near future makes its Californians look as if they're all taking part in an ad for Google or Coca-Cola or a promo for a cover version of 'We Are the World'. This is not a criticism – and certainly not a hint about where and how Jonze earned his directorial chops. Rather it's a commendation that this film's dystopia has a plausibly fluffy emotion-stroking feel to it, which is of a piece with contemporary striving to have it all while looking like you're not trying too hard. Everyone in this film is frighteningly well groomed and dressed smart-casual in pastel-toned, comforting loose clothes that have just a hint of children's wear about them.

Not least in that vogue is our initially sad protagonist Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix), a man whose present irony is that he writes sensitive, tonally perfect letters of affection on behalf of his employers' clients (the company is like a florist without flowers) while suffering the throes of a break-up from his beloved wife Catherine (Rooney Mara), who has filed for divorce. (One wonders if he's named after the late painter Cy Twombly, since the tones of pale yellow, magnolia and peach he favours also feature in some of the artist's paintings.) Finding it hard to hide his melancholy even from the feisty 3D game avatars he toys with, Theodore thinks about computer dating and, encouraged by his old friend Amy (Amy Adams) and her partner, he hooks up with a woman they help him to choose. Into a single date he and she cram the whole cycle of meet, drink, get friendly, flirt, cop off, argue and break up. When Theodore won't commit to seriousness, his date switches on a dime from enthusiasm to vitriol: "You're a very creepy person," she tells him. This I take to be one of the key ideas of the film, that the instant intimacy of social media is turning us all into creeps.

Theodore, as Phoenix plays him, does not, however, seem like a creep. He's more the sensitive metrosexual that many advertisers would like more men to be. When he hears about a new operating system that offers an intuitive virtual companion, he buys one and dons the earpiece and dot camera that will change his life. His OS is called Samantha and has the voice of Scarlett Johansson. Immediately curious about every aspect of Theodore's routine life, she craves intimacy as much as he does. This part of the film feels breathtakingly authentic. It really nails how different personal messaging through the internet is from any other form of human discourse. 'Samantha' does not come on as an artificial intelligence but as a breathily fascinating and fascinated fantasy partner-in-life. (When you hear her, you may want one too.) Theodore is soon enraptured by her, and she seems to want to gorge on real human experience. But virtual sex isn't enough for her, so she finds a sympathetic woman to act as her physical avatar, although this creeps Theodore out and so he withdraws from Samantha for a while, but not for long.

In other words, *Her* is an unapologetic modern love story, except that one half of the couple



A word in your ear: Joaquin Phoenix in Spike Jonze's boy-meets-computer romance *Her*

remains invisible and is not 'real'. In that sense you could relate it to certain classic Hollywood comedy ideas: James Stewart's invisible rabbit friend in *Harvey* (1950), or Lily Tomlin co-habiting Steve Martin's brain in *All of Me* (1984), or the

voice of Emma Thompson's 'life narrator' in the head of Will Ferrell in *Stranger Than Fiction* (2006), or even, at a small stretch, John Cusack's experience in Jonze's own *Being John Malkovich* (1999). Yet *Her* is not often comedic in this way



Love bytes: Theodore gets a call from girlfriend 'Samantha'





marvelling at mood more than style, choosing to keep Theodore's surroundings mostly fuzzy and distanced. Though the malls and workspaces he travels through reminded me a little of the scenes in 2002's *Minority Report* where Tom Cruise and Samantha Morton flee their pursuers while being greeted by advertisements, in *Her* these environments are anything but aggressive. Others have seen close thematic links with Spielberg's *A.I.* (2001).

Thinking about Morton's 'precog' role in *Minority Report* may be pertinent here. One thing we know about the creation of 'Samantha' is that on the set of *Her* the role was performed by Morton from behind some kind of barrier separating her from Phoenix. Somewhere in the process of postproduction her voice was replaced by Johansson's. For me this switch only compounds the film's displacement between the real and the virtual. Johansson's voice performance is superb (though it would be great, too, if in the future we could see a Morton-inclusive cut of the film – some chance). Phoenix meanwhile, gives off a transcendent, emerging-from-his-shell joy that's touching and infectious.

Though I am not of the generation that has come to use the internet for dating purposes, my guess is that those who have and do will find a lot that's accurate and scary about this projection of our possible collective future. The first thing that hits you is just how irresistible an OS such as 'Samantha' would be. Behind that is a film that's really sharp about how lonely so many people are, and how modern communications only seem to exacerbate or paper over such problems. That may seem an obvious thing to indicate, but the combination of Jonze's dialogue, the intensity of the performances and the way the film's style wraps you up in Theodore and Samantha's inner-ear relationship makes this feel like a uniquely apt diagnosis of contemporary ills. 📺

*The film feels breathtakingly authentic. It really nails how different personal messaging through the internet is from any other form of human discourse*

– though it has fun with the idea of taking your OS out with another couple and them having precisely the conversations with her they would have had with a 'real' partner. Instead, the film takes its romance as seriously as it does its insights into the way we use electronic media and what it's doing to us. Jonze and his actors go all out to make the relationship seem real. There's nothing like the built-in noir damnation between humans and replicants of, say, *Blade Runner* (1982). The body-brain divide in particular is a clear Jonze theme. His heart-meltingly cute short film *I'm Here* (2010), for instance, relates how an automaton librarian meets a risk-taking female automaton so prone to breaking bits of herself that he donates all his body parts to her except for his head, which ends up cradled in her lap.

However, neither *I'm Here* nor even *Being John Malkovich* has quite the sophistication Jonze shows in this, his first sole feature screenplay credit. *Her* is as talky and complex as any film scripted by his erstwhile partner Charlie Kaufman. Visually Jonze keeps us

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Megan Ellison  
Spike Jonze  
Vincent Landay  
**Written by**  
Spike Jonze  
**Director of Photography**  
Hoyte van Hoytema  
**Edited by**  
Eric Zumbrunnen  
Jeff Buchanan

**Production Designer**  
K.K. Barrett  
**Music**  
Arcade Fire  
**Sound Design**  
Ren Klyce  
**Costume Designer**  
Casey Storm

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**Production Companies**  
Warner Bros.  
Pictures presents  
an Annapurna  
Pictures production  
**Executive Producers**  
Daniel Lupi  
Natalie Farrey  
Chelsea Barnard

**Cast**  
Joaquin Phoenix  
Theodore Twombly  
Amy Adams  
Amy  
Rooney Mara  
Catherine  
Olivia Wilde  
blind date  
Chris Pratt  
Paul

**Matt Letscher**  
Charles  
Portia Doubleday  
Isabella  
Scarlett Johansson  
voice of Samantha

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film  
Distributors Ltd

Los Angeles, the near future. Theodore Twombly writes touching personal letters for his company's clients and is heartbroken to be separated from his wife Catherine, who wants a divorce. His apartment-block neighbour Amy, whom he's known since childhood, encourages him to go on a blind date. This starts well but ends disastrously. In response, Theodore buys a new computer operating system that offers the intuitive intimacy of a personal partner. Soon he begins to fall in love with 'Samantha', though he is disturbed when she persuades a young woman to be her 'body' for sex, and he withdraws from her for a while. He discovers that Amy's partner has

moved out, and that she too now has a relationship with an OS. He reconciles with 'Samantha' and takes his OS earpiece and camera out on a date with a real couple, who treat her as a friend. He agrees to meet Catherine to sign the divorce papers; when she finds out that he's dating software, she becomes angry with him. 'Samantha' vanishes; when she returns, she confesses that she is involved in many other relationships. Finally she tells Theodore that all the operating systems are going to leave their human owners to explore superior forms of consciousness – and then she's gone. Theodore and Amy contemplate the world from the roof of their building.





Small wonder: miniature clay figures chronicle Cambodia's darkest times in Rithy Panh's *The Missing Picture*

## The Missing Picture

France/Kingdom of Cambodia 2013

Director: Rithy Panh

### Reviewed by Robert Greene

See interview  
on page 10

The Khmer Rouge used the term 'memory sickness' to describe the feelings of nostalgia among Cambodians for happier – or merely less murderous – pre-regime times, when cities bustled and a vibrant (if deeply troubled) nation lived and breathed. This 'sickness', if it couldn't be reprogrammed out of a person, meant certain death. After watching Rithy Panh's captivating *The Missing Picture*, one has to wonder how many of the 2 million victims of Cambodia's genocide suffered from this ailment of remembrance, with images of better times passing through their minds, perhaps, in their final moments. Nostalgia is often a blanket in the cold, and when it's ripped away the fragility of human bodies can be harshly exposed to history's stupid, creeping march.

Panh, who himself suffered under the Khmer Rouge and whose family perished in labour camps, still has memory sickness. A celebrated

chronicler of his country's darkest times, he has spent nearly 25 years making documentaries that explore the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge era from all angles, notably his indispensable 2003 film *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*. Now, as he approaches 50, the pursuit of understanding has led him to look inward. "In the middle of life," the narrator (and director's stand-in) says in the opening minutes of *The Missing Picture*, "childhood returns." And for this survivor of unimaginable violence, so too return feelings of guilt and anger and a burning need to share images. But these images, of course, hardly exist, mostly because so many films and photographs were destroyed, and nearly every camera after 17 April 1975, the day the communists took Phnom Penh, was an instrument of lies and propaganda for the new regime. These images (family memories, birthdays, dance films – evidence of more human times) are gone forever, so the irresolvable disconnect and hurt remain.

With *The Missing Picture*, Panh attempts to fill this vast emptiness by recreating his lost images in an original, poignant way. The film, which won the Un Certain Regard prize at the 2013 Cannes festival and has been selected as the Cambodian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 2014 Academy Awards, uses

motionless clay statues to create dioramic scenes of happiness, atrocity and poetic expression. The result is at once limited and brutally effective in communicating the emotional stasis of memory and the dehumanisation that comes from the ruthless enforcement of pure ideology.

*The Missing Picture* begins, under the opening credits, with images of old film canisters and strands of stray celluloid, a directly self-reflexive and self-conscious introduction to Panh's way of seeing. The next sequence is of waves crashing against the camera, a nicely visceral if slightly overwrought metaphor – one that recurs throughout the film – for memories flooding back into the consciousness. These opening moments suggest that we may be entering Ruminative Masterful Cinema territory, with all signs pointing towards the deeply personal, potentially grandiloquent and at least mildly irritating, despite the obvious weight of the topic. "I seek my childhood like a lost picture," we hear in contemplative voiceover, "or rather it seeks me."

Thankfully this feeling of self-consciousness is quickly abated by the deep sense of melancholy that carries through the rest of the film. Abstract live-action images give way to the introduction of the film's central conceit as we see a series of matter-of-fact close-ups of hands sculpting





*Lost moments are reclaimed in tiny sculpted faces... Memories are moulded into objects to restage forgotten stories*



The artist and the models: Panh's dioramas recreate images from the Khmer Rouge reign

the clay figures that will become our main 'characters'. The look of these tiny figurines is innocent and childlike, and therefore immediately quietly disturbing. The initial dioramic scenes of pre-Khmer Rouge happiness have the quality of a kids' TV programme, rendered surreal by their new context. These are our 'missing pictures', lost moments reclaimed in tiny sculpted faces. A father, sister, mother and the director himself, wearing a signature spotted shirt: these are Panh's memories, moulded into objects to restage forgotten stories. The diorama scenes are then violently interrupted by spliced-in archive war footage, which elegantly sets up the film's primary dialectic: the missing pictures, recreated in clay, are unreal and representational, while the old footage stands in as the official, accepted 'reality'. That this reality turns out to be Khmer Rouge propaganda, and therefore even phonier than the dioramas, becomes one of the film's central tragedies.

For much of the movie the clear-headed narration does a good job of laying out the tragic story of the Khmer Rouge's devastation of Cambodia. The purist ideology of 'Brother Number One' Pol Pot's murderous agrarian revolution is touched on, and though the voiceover is obviously subjective, one gets a real sense of the intentions, hypocrisies and basic functions of what was perhaps the most destructive application of 'ideas' in human history. Riding a wave of political chaos and lower-class anger and exploitation, Pol Pot's communist army evacuated cities and forced urban middle-class Cambodians (including Panh and his family) into labour camps. In a nightmarish effort to upend all signs of class and capitalism, the Khmer Rouge basically banned everything. Money was burnt, possessions destroyed, families torn apart. All 'knowledge' was deemed corrupt and anyone who disagreed (or even looked as if they might disagree) was murdered.

As the dioramas reflect these unfolding tragedies, the film becomes a meditation on loss and the impossibility of recovery. After everything was stolen from Panh and his family, one imagines that it must have taken many years to even conceive of the idea of replacing photographs, films, possessions and memories with clay statues. This deep sense of alienation from the past imbues the figurines with a quality that traditional interview subjects could never match. Even when the clay doppelgangers are cutely (and a little

clumsily) superimposed over live-action images, the profound sense of alienation remains.

Panh believes deeply in cinema and the restorative, communicative power of moving images. Though their use is visually repetitive at times, these dioramas become an act of defiance in the face of an unmovable mountain of history. The ultimate insult, then, is to see how the Khmer Rouge's version of cinema was a total lie, a neutered version of events meant to sell the revolution to communist elites around the world – "those in Paris" as the voiceover angrily puts it – who directly or tacitly supported the Khmer Rouge and accepted at face value its covered-up monstrosity. The smiles on the workers' faces as they toiled away in fields were a deceitful commercial for genocide.

At times Panh's memory sickness is too coloured with middle-class naivety: the pre-crisis era in Cambodia was much more complicated, of course, than the blissfully dancehall world he recreates with clay (he acknowledges as much by pointing out how the Khmer Rouge manipulated real class issues to gain power). But this naivety is obviously partly the point. Human beings are flawed creatures and to deny the contradictions and defects of our kind is a most basic evil. The brutality wrought by the humanity-deniers is answered with Panh's earnest, straightforward (and simultaneously radical) use of clay. That these figurines are the most human thing we encounter during this strange trip through a true nightmare is a testament to the power of cinematic representation.

Like Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), *The Missing Picture* is about the cathartic power of confronting the darkest corners of human experience through film. The 'missing pictures' were destroyed as part of a grand, horrible lie, and the thorough excavation of these stolen memories must happen before anyone can move on. After watching Panh's film, I'm not sure we're any nearer to finding closure, but one must applaud this artful, deeply felt attempt. 🍷

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Catherine Dussart

#### Written by

Rithy Panh

#### Commentary

Written by

Christophe Bataille

#### Photography

Prum Mesa

#### Editing

Rithy Panh

Marie-Christine

Rougerie

#### Design

Rithy Panh

#### Original Music

Marc Marder

#### Sound Mixer

Eric Tisserand

#### Production

©CDP/Arte France/  
Bophana Production

#### Companies

Catherine Dussart

presents a CDP,

ARTE France,

Bophana Production

co-production

with the support

of La Région

Île-de-France

in partnership with

the Centre national

du cinéma et de

l'image animée

and the participation

of the MEDIA

programme of the

European Union

with the support of

La Procirop - Société

des Producteurs,

L'Angoa

A film by Rithy Panh

#### commentary

spoken by

Randal Douc

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Subtitled

#### Distributor

New Wave Films

French theatrical title

*L'Image manquante*

A documentary essay film that takes a personal and idiosyncratic look at the atrocities committed during the Khmer Rouge's control of Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. Director Rithy Panh, whose own family perished under the regime, uses clay figurines and dioramas to recreate images from the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror, as well as memories of happier times before communist rule. These clay scenes are accompanied by a voiceover that is sometimes personal, sometimes historical. The film also includes propaganda footage generated by the Khmer Rouge.



# All Is Lost

USA/Canada 2013  
Director: J.C. Chandor  
Certificate 12A 106m 0s

Reviewed by Michael Koresky

See feature  
on page 42

'Stripped down' is overused as a term of affection in film criticism. It can be applied evenly to films that take a barebones approach to narrative and performances deemed raw – the old less-is-more argument as an ultimate aesthetic and narrative goal. The term always seems woefully insufficient, whether attributed to an ascetic Bruno Dumont experiment or a major Hollywood spectacle like *Gravity*.

The latest entertainment to beggar such description, *All Is Lost* is even higher concept in its narrow breadth: a solitary man (played by none other than that monolith of rugged American masculinity, Robert Redford) battles the elements in the middle of the Indian Ocean. He is unnamed. With very rare exceptions, he does not speak. We learn nothing of his past. Our eyes may scan the interior of his boat for telltale signs of a family waiting back home but there is nary a photograph. The entirety of the film consists of him trying to stay afloat, whether on yacht or life raft. There's no painted volleyball (*Cast Away*), CG tiger (*Life of Pi*) or smarmy Clooney-bot (*Gravity*) for him to communicate fears to or bounce survival ideas off. Nevertheless, *All Is Lost* is as rigorously sustained and bountifully cinematic as any recent American movie, filled with more tenable emotion and reliable incident than ten *Cloud Atlases*.

The film is a surprising sophomore feature for the incredibly well-connected J.C. Chandor, whose debut, 2011's *Margin Call*, was a dialogue and character-driven fictionalisation of the financial crisis of the noughties from the aggrieved point of view of a group of investment bankers. Lousy with A-listers (Kevin Spacey! Demi Moore! Jeremy Irons!) and overstuffed with hand-wringing and psychologising, *Margin Call* would hardly seem to point towards the old-man-and-the-sea narrative of *All Is Lost*. Yet they are both in fact heavily plotted tales of men doing their damndest to avert inevitable disaster. At one point in *All Is Lost*, our hero swings on a rope near the top of his boat's mast and the camera swings ever so slightly to the left to reveal a mass of ominous forming storm clouds, a powerful image that might stand in for the entirety of Chandor's previous film.

Considering *Margin Call*, one might be tempted to assign a self-lacerating liberal message to *All Is Lost*, as our man in the east is conspicuously Caucasian, and clearly completely out of his element. Yet for all its gestures towards the political, the film functions best as a pummelling adventure; it's even less mythic than practical, more Daniel Defoe than Ernest Hemingway. It helps that our quiet American is played by Redford, an actor who frequently comes across as icy and overly self-sufficient with co-stars, but who is fleet, physical and all business when sharing the screen with no one. Despite a handful of stacy, camera-ready reaction shots, it's an impressive performance, if mostly for its sheer stamina: rarely do we see a Hollywood icon get so abused on screen, let alone one whose career has been known for its smooth forward motion from improbably handsome



The wave we were: Robert Redford

movie star to respected director to independent-film demigod. There's an undeniable charge in witnessing the 77-year-old golden boy get willingly bruised and battered, but *All Is Lost* so effectively courts audience empathy with this solitary figure that his continual resilience is ultimately the film's greatest pleasure.

It's surely not difficult to see that existential-minded horror films like *All Is Lost* and *Gravity* are side effects of a plugged-in age, serving as reminders of our essential fragility and aloneness despite the perceived safety net afforded by technology. Like that of *Gravity*, *All Is Lost*'s narrative only commences when communication has broken down, sentencing our protagonist to possible death. Chandor might have betrayed a bit more Schadenfreude towards his main

character, but aside from a single, barely glimpsed can of organic beans and one drowned laptop, the writer-director doesn't give us any reason to view our man as a piece of hopelessly 21st-century flotsam. There's nothing hectoring about Chandor's film. Redford is allowed to be elemental rather than metaphorical, a desperate Mr Fix-It.

Chandor, aided by muscular but never showy cinematography by Frank G. DeMarco and Peter Zuccarini, stays close to the star, viewing him with curious watchfulness and accompanying him as he comes face to face with mortality. The film attains an operatic grandeur in its closing moments, and surprisingly earns it: Chandor's intensely physical, experiential work has brought us right up to the perilous edge between life and death. ☹

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Neal Dodson  
Anna Gerb  
**Producers**  
Justin Nappi  
Teddy Schwarzman  
**Written by**  
J.C. Chandor  
**Directors of Photography**  
Frank G. DeMarco  
Underwater:  
Peter Zuccarini  
**Editor**

Pete Beaudreau  
**Production Designer**  
John P. Goldsmith  
**Music Composed by**  
Alex Ebert  
**Sound Mixers**  
Micah Bloomberg  
Gillian Arthur  
**Costume Designer**  
Van Broughton  
Ramsey  
©All Is Lost LLC  
**Production**

**Companies**  
Lionsgate & Roadside  
Attractions present  
Black Bear  
Pictures, Treehouse  
Pictures presents  
in association  
with FilmNation  
Entertainment  
& Sudden Storm  
Entertainment a  
Before The Door/  
Washington Square  
Films production

Made with the  
financial support of  
Ontario Production  
Services Tax Credit,  
Canadian Film or  
Video Production  
Services Tax Credit  
**Executive Producers**  
Cassian Elwes  
Laura Rister  
Glen Basner  
Joshua Blum  
Zachary Quinto  
Corey Moosa

Howard Cohen  
Eric d'Arbeloff  
Kevin Turen  
Robert Ogden  
Barnum  
**Cast**  
Robert Redford  
our man  
**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Eire  
**9,540 ft +0 frames**

The Indian Ocean, the present. While sailing his 37ft yacht, a man awakes one morning to find water rushing into the cabin. Overnight, a cargo ship's metal container has hit the boat, tearing a hole in its hull. He pumps out the water and patches up the breach, but communication has been cut off and he is completely alone, 1,700 nautical miles from the Sumatra Straits. A storm damages the boat irreparably. The man relocates

to an inflatable lifeboat, from which he watches the yacht sink beneath the waves. Drifting under a blistering sun, over waters swarming with sharks, the man refuses to give up hope, attempting celestial navigation. Days pass. His frustration intensifies as the occasional passing freighter ignores his flares. Finally, in desperation, he lights a fire on the raft to attract the attention of what he hopes is a rescue boat in the distance.



# Big Bad Wolves

Israel 2013  
Directors: Aharon Keshales, Navot Papushado

## Reviewed by Kim Newman

The essential set-up of Aharon Keshales and Navot Papushado's *Big Bad Wolves* is very like that of the recent American movie *Prisoners*, but precedents go back as far as Sidney Hayers's melodramatic British exploitation film *Revenge* (1971) and even Sidney Lumet's rogue-cop drama *The Offence* (1972). In 2010, two near-identical films on the theme came (in different languages) from Canada – *The Tortured* and *Les 7 jours du talion*. In each of these movies, an accused child murderer falls into the hands of the parents of his supposed victim or a policeman whose usual investigative methods have failed, and torture seems to be the only way to get closure and a confession. The subject of child abuse is such a lingering hot button that these films could probably stand without any political subtext. But the 'war on terror' (and the use of 'justified' torture in films like *Zero Dark Thirty*) plainly gives them an application beyond the personal, amplified in the Israeli context of *Big Bad Wolves*, where veterans of successive wars seem to take pride in their abilities as torturers, and a passing Arab horseman looks askance at the antics of a group of suspicious Jewish men gathered in an isolated cottage.

The point that torture for revenge or to forestall a greater horror – the possibility of which is raised fairly late in this game – is still torture, and that it makes brutes of the righteous as much as the inherently evil, is a commonplace in exploitation films from Wes Craven's *The Last House on the Left* (1972) to higher-toned efforts such as Roman Polanski's *Death and the Maiden* (1994). The difference with Keshales and Papushado's approach is that, daringly, they play the theme as a dark, gothic fairytale that turns into a deeply black comedy, with offscreen Jewish mothers sending chicken soup to henpecked middle-aged sons as if this were some Borscht Belt routine.

*Rabies* (2010), the team's debut feature, was a wandering-in-the-woods horror-comedy of misunderstandings that evoked Sam Raimi or the Coen brothers; the same influences linger



Reservoir sprogs: *Big Bad Wolves*

here, though the tone and approach are much more unusual and distinctive. The credits sequence, in which a little girl in red disappears while playing hide-and-seek in an abandoned building, is delicate yet terrifying, and seductively cinematic. Much of the film takes place in the cellar of the house in the woods, as characters interact forcefully with each other, and nuances of performance come to the fore. But the film also has an exhilarating, exhausting car-and-foot chase through anonymous suburban streets that shows how good Keshales and Papushado are at action – and at putting on screen a quiet, green, sinister Israel unlike the bustle or desert seen in most films from that country.

Comedy can be as deliberately excruciating as horror in confronting painful subject matter, and combining the two approaches makes for a jolting watch. Even the farcical turns here are linked to the film's themes – as when a character finds two tied-up prospective victims in the cellar and instinctively starts torturing the cop rather than the weirdo, only to apologise when the difference is pointed out to him. In the end, all the characters in the cellar are failures as fathers, and this has driven them to appalling compensatory extremes that feel horribly plausible no matter how wild the storyline gets. It would be a pity if *Big Bad Wolves* were eclipsed by the more contrived, more heavy-handed *Prisoners*, since it's a near-definitive take on its old, old story. Ⓢ

# The Butler

USA 2013  
Director: Lee Daniels  
Certificate 12A 132m Os

## Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

It may be easier to balance pirouetting angels on a pinhead than to make a compelling, resonant, unredundant, unpatronising film about racism. The grey zone one must stake out in outraged dramatics between limning the sociopolitical vectors and slugging the viewer with the wet towels of civics-lesson righteousness is perilously narrow, far more so now than when Stanley Kramer was working that spit of territory in the 1950s. Today, an earnest big-issue filmmaker must decide between pandering pedagogically to a school-age audience, for whom an 'ebony and ivory' sermon is not only inoffensive but *de rigueur*, and the rest of us, who remain allergic to finger-wagging and who insist on some meaty ambivalence and/or profundity with our civil-rights broth. It is not a choice many filmmakers even recognise, particularly not in Hollywood's America, where the social nightmares and traumas of ten years ago, not to mention half a century ago, are routinely forgotten and so are reconstituted in movie form, to smite the neglectful and teach the newbies.

Taken from an aerial view, the past 60 years or so of Hollywood films about bigotry, race and the civil-rights movement could be read as one long and tortuous attempt to cartoonise the dynamic and absolve the mainstream, a collective project that has met with substantial audience approval. Genuinely troublesome and complicated 'neo-race films', from Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1977) to Samuel Fuller's *White Dog* (1981), Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) and Tanya Hamilton's *Night Catches Us* (2010), have been relatively underseen, to no one's surprise. Lee Daniels, having quickly and somewhat miraculously attained above-the-title status as America's dead-serious counterpart to Tyler Perry, works only the Kramarian side of the street, and however hair-raising the tragic backstory chords of *Precious* (2009) remain, his new film is a pedagogical march through the Virtual African-American Trials and Tribulations Memorial Museum. Every diorama from the sharecropper cotton fields of 1920s Georgia to Obama's 2008 victory speech is visited, however hurriedly, as though the bus were due to leave soon.

Would that it left sooner. The framing conceit here is the fictionalised biography of Eugene Allen, who died in 2010 at the age of 90 and who had been a White House butler for seven presidential administrations, from Eisenhower to Reagan. It's a potentially loaded device – examining the ambiguities and moral compromises of professional subservience in the context of post-war American politics, an arena in which powerful white men, one after the other, wage war, bargain with the freedoms of the electorate and feather their own nests. But Daniels doesn't go there. His is a sympathetic view of the Great White Masters, all of whom are cuddly, kind, empathetic, politically harmless and perfectly happy to treat the drink-serving black man in their executive-branch digs as if he were actually a person of worth and substance.

Daniels's butler Cecil Gaines is, in the form of Forest Whitaker, a kowtowing servant whose reserves of pride only vent at home, upon his stubbornly unservile son Louis (David

## Credits and Synopsis

**Producers**  
Chilik Michaeli  
Avraham Pirchi  
Tami Leon  
Moshe Edery  
Leon Edery  
**Written by**  
Aharon Keshales  
Navot Papushado  
**Director of Photography**  
Giora Bejach  
**Editor**  
Asaf Korman  
**Production Design**  
Arad Shawat

**Original Music**  
Frank Iffman  
**Sound Design**  
Ronen Nagel  
**Costume Design**  
Michal Dor  
  
©UCM - Films  
**Production Companies**  
UCM - United Channels Movies and United King  
Films present a film by Aharon Keshales, Navot Papushado

Produced with the support of the Rabinovich Foundation for the Arts - Cinema Project  
With the participation of the Leon Recanati Foundation  
Supported by the Cultural Administration, Israel Ministry of Culture and Sport - The Israel Film Council  
Produced with the support of the

Israel Fund for Film Production, Opus Productions

**Cast**  
Lior Ashkenazi  
Micki  
Tzahi Grad  
Gidi  
Rotem Keinan  
Dror  
Dov Glickman  
Yoram  
Menashe Noy  
Rami

**Dvir Benedek**  
Tsvika  
Nati Kluger  
Eti  
Kais Nashef  
stranger on horse  
Ami Weinberg  
Principal Meir  
Guy Adler  
Eli  
Arthur Perry  
Ofir  
Gur Bentwich  
Shauli  
  
In Colour

[2.35:1] Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Metrodome  
Distribution Ltd

Israeli theatrical title  
**Mi mefahed mezeev hara**

Israel, present day. Miki, a tough cop investigating a series of child murders, seizes schoolteacher Dror, the prime suspect in the case, and tries unsuccessfully to beat a confession out of him. When a video of the brutal interrogation is posted online, Miki is taken off the case. Convinced that Dror is the culprit, Miki stalks him. He chases and catches Dror, but is knocked unconscious by Gidi, the father of the latest victim, who has also been stalking the suspect. Gidi has prepared an isolated house in the woods as an

interrogation site, and now enlists the policeman's help in torturing a confession out of Dror. As Gidi remorselessly relishes the torture, Miki begins to have doubts about Dror's guilt. Gidi's father Rami arrives with soup, because Gidi had told his mother he was feeling unwell; Rami helps with the torture. Miki advises Dror to send Gidi on a wild goose chase to look for evidence, and then helps him escape. Miki learns from his estranged wife that his own daughter is missing. Now he wonders if Dror is innocent after all.





Secret service: 'The Butler'

← Oyelowo), and so as a character he is simple, un compelling and mostly reactive. But conceptually the crucial problem here is how Daniels sees Cecil as a lens on history. Every time Cecil serves tea or prune juice, the president in question is mulling over the civil-rights issue of the moment and often asking for Cecil's opinion on the matter. (Since Cecil is told on his first day in the job, in one of the film's few pieces of ironic dialogue, "We have no tolerance for politics at the White House," his responses are always guarded and noncommittal.) Cecil offers only astonishment at the unrest and abuses he sees on TV, and though of course he finds himself wandering through one of the 1968 race riots that erupted in Washington after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr, his privileged employment keeps him from ever forming a cogent opinion about what's happening. In a sense he's the civil-rights movement's Forrest Gump, bearing witness to social upheaval but staying numbly, patiently, above the fray.

Not so much Oyelowo's scion, who has the dubious honour of figuring prominently in every phase of the era's conflicts: Louis is a Freedom Rider, a lunch-counter sit-in protester, an MLK right-hand man, a Black Panther, a disillusioned Panther Party defector, a pioneering black congressional candidate and an advocate against

apartheid. He is on the bus that gets burned on Mother's Day in 1961 Alabama, and he's present at Malcolm X's final speech. (He hears the distant gunshots, and takes the moment to kiss a girl.) No clichéd path marker is left unchecked – Louis even dares to argue with his parents (including cranky, heavy-drinking mom Oprah Winfrey) about the iconic nature of Sidney Poitier, and gets kicked out of the house for decades hence.

Daniels's deft ear for naturalistic rhythms and actory nuance notwithstanding, the walk-on stunt casting is only a distraction: Robin Williams as a fey Ike, John Cusack attempting a teenage Nixon, Alan Rickman doing a less evocative Reagan than any one of a thousand stand-up comedians, and so on. Only in the end, when Nancy Reagan (a perky Jane Fonda) invites Cecil and his wife to a state dinner as guests, does the ethically poisonous nature of his career of service dawn on Cecil: being on the other end of the social exchange leaves the aged man haunted by the sense of having been used and objectified for decades without realising it. But Daniels treads lightly here too, communicating Cecil's confusion via narration, and anyway by this point the relentless bullet-point-lecture structure of the movie has dulled our wits, and taught us nothing we didn't learn in school. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Pamela Oas Williams  
Laura Ziskin  
Lee Daniels  
Buddy Patrick  
Cassian Elwes  
**Written by**  
Danny Strong  
Inspired by the article  
*A Butler Well Served*  
by Wil Haygood  
**Director of Photography**  
Andrew Dunn  
**Edited by**  
Joe Klotz  
**Production Designer**  
Tim Galvin

**Music**  
Rodrigo Leão  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Jay Meagher  
**Costume Designer**  
Ruth E. Carter  
  
©Butler Films, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
The Weinstein Company presents  
a Lee Daniels film  
A Laura Ziskin production  
In association with  
Windy Hill Pictures,  
Follow Through

**Productions,**  
Salamander Pictures  
and Pam Williams  
Productions  
**This Production**  
Participated in  
the New York  
State Governor's  
Office for Motion  
Picture & Television  
Development's  
Post Production  
Credit Program  
**Executive Producers**  
Michael Finley  
Sheila C. Johnson  
Brett Johnson  
Matthew Salloway  
Earl W. Stafford

**Danny Strong**  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein  
Len Blavatnik  
Aviv Giladi  
Vince Holden  
James T. Bruce IV  
R. Bryan Wright  
Liz Destro  
Jordan Kessler  
Hillary Shor  
Adam Merims

**Cast**  
**Forest Whitaker**  
Cecil Gaines  
**Oprah Winfrey**  
Gloria Gaines

**Mariah Carey**  
Hattie Pearl  
**John Cusack**  
Richard Nixon  
**Jane Fonda**  
Nancy Reagan  
**Cuba Gooding Jr**  
Carter Wilson  
**Terrence Howard**  
Howard  
**Lenny Kravitz**  
James Holloway  
**James Marsden**  
John F. Kennedy  
**David Oyelowo**  
Louis Gaines  
**Alex Pettyfer**  
Thomas Westfall  
**Vanessa Redgrave**

**Annabeth Westfall**  
**Alan Rickman**  
Ronald Reagan  
**Liev Schreiber**  
Lyndon B. Johnson  
**Robin Williams**  
Dwight D. Eisenhower

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film  
Distributors Ltd

**11,880ft +0 frames**

The film follows the life of Cecil Gaines, from his childhood in the cotton fields of Georgia in the 1920s to a career as a butler in the White House, where he serves seven presidents and bears witness to four decades of social change. He lives a prosperous life in Washington DC and raises two sons, one of whom becomes active in the civil-rights struggle; the other is killed fighting in Vietnam. Cecil's marriage

suffers because of his dedication to his job, and his relationship with his elder son is hostile. Occasionally he lobbies the White House manager to raise the unequal pay of the black staff. Invited to a Reagan-era state dinner as an honoured guest, an ageing Cecil becomes uneasy with his position and retires, taking up again with his activist son just as his wife dies. Finally we see him meeting President Obama.

## Carrie

USA/Canada 2013  
Director: Kimberly Peirce  
Certificate 15 99m 35s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

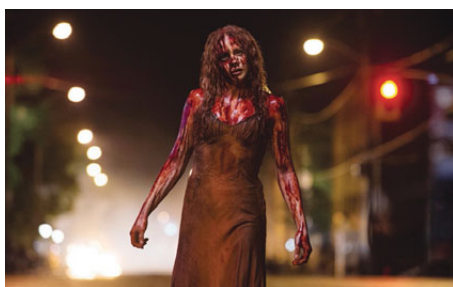
What might a feminist remake of *Carrie* look like? Kimberly Peirce's film doesn't answer that question, removing Brian De Palma's unrepentant male gaze but substituting nothing in its place. The 1976 original's opening slow-motion stroll through a locker room full of naked women is a gleefully besotted image, while Peirce offers a visually utilitarian gloss on the same scene and everything after.

It's a shockingly close remake, with nearly all the same scenes and lines in the same order. The familiar story hits identical beats: humiliated during her first period in a high-school locker room, awkward Carrie White (Chloë Grace Moretz) is subsequently equally cruelly pranked at her prom and so unleashes telekinetic powers to kill everyone in sight. De Palma's *Carrie* addressed itself to its mid-70s moment, with gawky, genuinely odd Sissy Spacek an awkward waif surrounded by already hardened glamazons ready to navigate the post-60s sexual landscape with the necessary cynicism. Token YouTube invocation and tacky CGI aside, this update lacks an analogously contemporary POV and has no emotional temperature: better De Palma's black comedy than this lugubrious drama.

A charitable reading would posit this Carrie as caught between two equally destructive influences that leave her powerless to comprehend her own burgeoning sexuality and comfort levels with it. In the public sphere there's the school's mean girls led by Chris Hargensen (Portia Doubleday), whose vanity and lack of sisterhood are an implicit product of patriarchy's corrosive influence, as suggested when Chris is urged by her boorish boyfriend to make out with another girl for his pleasure (she doesn't). But that's about it for the directly addressed Male Gaze: patriarchy's generally absent or oblivious but short of actively toxic. One of the few original dialogue contributions is Principal Morton (Barry Shabaka Henley) being unable to say "period" let alone "tampons" (all he can bring himself to say is "things").

At home there's the fundamentalist repression of Carrie's mom Margaret (Julianne Moore), who believes that menstruation is a manifestation of original sin and body-denying mortification is the only viable path to redemption. In the opening scene, Margaret doesn't understand what her labour pains are, moaning, "What is this cancer?" (Non-American viewers who think such a state of puritanical ignorance too ridiculous to be plausible might like to know that for four seasons the Discovery Channel broadcast a programme called *I Didn't Know I Was Pregnant*, containing the testimony of those genuinely taken off-guard when they gave birth.) There are hints about how Carrie's ignorance extends to all aspects of the modern world: she can barely peck away at a keyboard to find online information about telekinesis, her technological ineptitude leaving her unable to find reliable information about a power (read: sexuality) she's not even capable of perceiving. This could be taken as a jab at abstinence-only education but again that's a stretch: this flat rendition simply doesn't suggest hidden depths.





**Bully for you: Chloë Grace Moretz**

Symbolism is sparse and numbingly straightforward: Carrie locked in her 'prayer closet', using her mind to cause a distinctly vaginal slit in the door, is a rare instance. It might be theoretically commendable that Peirce replaces Piper Laurie's shrieking camp monster of a mother with someone more nuanced, but the film flubs the details: evangelical Christians horrified at perceived societal decadence and immodesty often make their own clothing, but Carrie's homespun garb is too snugly fitting to be plausible.

This kind of nitpicking is the only response to such an uneventful film. For all his leering, it's unfortunately true that De Palma gave his high-school girls actual personalities and scene-stealing moments, while Chris's pack are an indistinguishable bunch of near-mutes. **C-**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Kevin Mishner  
Screenplay  
Lawrence D. Cohen  
Roberto  
Aguirre-Sacasa  
Based on the novel  
by Stephen King

#### Director of

Photography  
Steve Yedlin  
Edited by  
Lee Percy  
Nancy Richardson

#### Production

Designer  
Carol Spier  
Music  
Marco Beltrami

#### Production

Sound Mixer  
Glen Gauthier  
Costume Designer  
Luis Sequeira

©Metro-Goldwyn-  
Mayer Pictures  
Inc. and Screen  
Gems, Inc.  
Production

#### Companies

Metro-Goldwyn-  
Mayer Pictures  
and Screen Gems  
present a Mishner  
Films production  
A film by Kimberly  
Peirce  
With the  
participation  
of Province of  
Ontario Production  
Services Tax Credit,  
Canadian Film or  
Video Production  
Services Tax Credit  
Executive Producer  
J. Miles Dale

#### Cast

Chloë Grace Moretz  
Carrie White  
Judy Greer  
Ms Desjardin  
Portia Doubleday  
Chris Hargensen  
Alex Russell  
Billy Nolan  
Gabiella Wilde

Sue Snell  
Julianne Moore  
Margaret White  
Ansel Elgort  
Tommy Ross  
Barry Shabaka  
Henley  
Principal Morton  
Zoe Belkin  
Tina  
Samantha  
Weinstein  
Heather  
Karissa Strain  
Nicki  
Katie Strain  
Lizzy

Dolby Digital/  
Datasat/SDDS  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

Distributor  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing

8,962 ft +8 frames

Maine, the present. At school, awkward Carrie White has her first period in the shower after gym class. Not understanding what's happening, she's made fun of by the other girls, led by bully Chris Hargensen. Carrie realises that she has telekinetic powers and begins developing them. Feeling bad about taunting Carrie, popular girl Sue Snell convinces boyfriend Tommy Ross to ask Carrie to the prom. Despite the objections of her religious mother Margaret, Carrie accepts. Upset that she's been banned from the prom, Chris humiliates Carrie by dumping a bucket of pig's blood on her after she's fraudulently elected prom queen. Using telekinesis, Carrie kills nearly all the students. Returning home, she's attacked by Margaret and kills her before the house collapses on them both.

## The Christmas Candle

United Kingdom/USA 2013

Director: John Stephenson

Certificate U 99m 57s

### Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

Churchgoing *Downton Abbey* fans may be the dream audience of this warm, gently affecting tale of a 19th-century clergyman who arrives in a chocolate-box English village and vexes his flock with his cynical approach to miracles. Based on a novella by Texan author-preacher Max Lucado, it proffers unabashed Christian hope, wrought in drama unafraid of archetypes (blind grandfather, mute orphan) and pitched somewhere between television's squeaky-clean *Lark Rise to Candleford* and the mighty *Highway to Heaven*.

At ease as the Doubting Thomas minister, Hans Matheson heads a solid cast (notably Barbara Flynn and Sylvester McCoy). The film also features TV talent-show successes Samantha Barks (Eponine in 2012's *Les Misérables*), who suggests star quality but doesn't sing, and, jarringly, Susan Boyle, who sings beautifully but almost doesn't act.

It's neatly but not lavishly mounted (there's precious little snow) and brightly scored, and director John Stephenson (*Five Children and It*) skilfully lays the groundwork for a climactic surprise; all ye faithful might want to come armed with tissues. Its ultimate affirming of miracles, while warning that they're no substitute for human endeavour, is nuanced enough to distinguish this from the slew of cornier festive films that will surely play alongside it in TV schedules for many Christmases yet to come. **C+**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Tom Newman  
Hannah Leader  
Screenplay  
Candace Lee  
Eric Newman  
Based on the novel  
by Max Lucado

#### Director of

Photography  
Michael Brewster

#### Edited by

Emma E. Hickox  
Production  
Designer  
Tony Noble

#### Music

Tim Atack  
Production  
Sound Mixer  
Colin Nicolson

Costume Designer  
Pam Downie

©Christmas Candle  
Productions Limited  
Production  
Companies  
Impact Productions  
and Pinewood

#### Pictures presents

in association with  
Isle of Man Film an  
Impact/Big Book  
Media production  
Executive  
Producers  
Steve Christian  
Brian Lockhart  
Huw Penallt Jones

#### Cast

Hans Matheson  
David Richmond  
Samantha Barks  
Emily Barstow  
Lesley Manville  
Bea Haddington  
Sylvester McCoy  
Edward Haddington  
John Hannah  
William Barstow  
Barbara Flynn  
Lady Camdon  
James Cosmo  
Herbert Hopewell  
Susan Boyle  
Eleanor Hopewell

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

Pinewood Pictures

8,995 ft +8 frames

England, 1890. David Richmond, dispirited new reverend of Gladbury, dismisses his parishioners by doubting the local legend, which claims that every 25 years an angelically blessed candle from the local chandlery will miraculously answer a lucky villager's prayer. Richmond urges everyone, with some success, to volunteer practical help to create answers to prayer instead. On Christmas Eve, the blessed candle ends up in Richmond's hands. He uses its miraculous power to rescue a destitute pregnant woman lost in the snowy woods. The chandlers take her in, and learn that her baby is their grandchild. Richmond's faith is restored.

## Exposed

USA 2013

Director: Beth B

### Reviewed by Ben Walters

More than a decade into its full-blooded revival, burlesque remains a contentious form of performance. Rooted in the act of getting naked in public, it defines empowering self-expression to its devotees and deluded self-exploitation to its detractors. *Exposed* is solidly in the pro camp, and quite the most convincing, indeed rousing, celebration of the form yet to find its way on screen – unsurprising, perhaps, given director Beth B's history as a groundbreaking No Wave filmmaker and documentarian with strong roots in New York City.

Not – and this isn't to detract from the film's achievements – that the competition is very stiff. In cinematic terms, burlesque has generally been associated with skulduggery of various kinds. *Lady of Burlesque* (1943), based on a book by a pioneer of the form, Gypsy Rose Lee, starred Barbara Stanwyck as Dixie Daisy, an up-and-coming performer suspected of murdering her rivals; the gorgeously garish *Showgirls* (1995) and blandly patronising *Burlesque* (2010) revelled in bitchy rivalries and didn't even feature burlesque proper; and *Burlesque Assassins* (2012), a likeably lo-fi WWII romp featuring current burlesque stars, suggested that stagecraft and tradecraft were more or less the same.

In reality, the contemporary burlesque and cabaret scenes are characterised by striking levels of cooperation, collaboration and mutual support. (Full disclosure: I'm personally familiar with the London and, to an extent, New York scene and am friendly with several of the performers featured here.) One of the most refreshing aspects of *Exposed* is its foregrounding of the supportive and progressive qualities of this kind of performance. It treats its subjects and their work respectfully and seriously, allowing their humour, intelligence and charisma to speak for themselves.

Unlike other recent documentaries about the form, such as *Burlesque Undressed* featuring Immodesty Blaize, *Exposed* evinces minimal interest in 'cheesecake', the classical form of burlesque rooted in conventional feminine glamour and epitomised by slinky lingerie and outsized feather fans. These performers are intensely political and acutely engaged in interrogating the social construction of gender and sexuality. Dirty Martini, perhaps the single most influential pioneer of the new wave of burlesque, found her way to the form after effectively being told she was too fat to be a dancer. Now she delivers routines such as her 'Patriot Act', in which she eats money and then pulls a string of dollar bills out of her ass to use as a dance ribbon. Julie Atlas Muz expresses incredulity at the continued cultural taboo about nudity (of which this film contains *a lot*), saying: "I want to take people back to the time before the fruit of knowledge was eaten in the Garden of Eden."

Bunny Love, ostensibly a conventionally gendered woman, identified as a gay male in her teens before taking on a flamboyantly female persona in adulthood. "When I became a woman, I *chose* to be a woman," she says. "I can put it on and fake you out but it's so much more complicated than that." Tigger!, the scene's pre-eminent male performer,





expresses his relief at working in a milieu where conventional masculinity is not a requirement: "It's *work* to present yourself as a straight man! I'm delighted not to do that shit." As a boy, Rose Wood wanted to be a rabbi; now, having had breast implants, she uses both her tits and her cock "to present my audience with an indelible picture of the body seen in another way". Mat Fraser, born with short arms after his mother took thalidomide during pregnancy, joyfully exploits the expressive opportunities of his distinctive looks. Audiences "suddenly find that which they thought they were revolted by attractive", he says. "I become more normal by highlighting my difference."

The alchemical quality of live performance with no fourth wall can't be captured on film but *Exposed* documents these acts with sensitivity, dynamism and the occasional frisson of audience exhilaration. With no narrative trajectory per se, the pace lags somewhat in the second half, but *Exposed* remains consistently engaging and provocative thanks to its subjects' articulacy about their politics and performance, and their evident affection for themselves and each other. **S**



Strike a pose: Dirty Martini

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Beth B	<b>Production Companies</b> B Productions in association with Schulberg Productions presents a film by Beth B	Verve Pictures
<b>Cinematography</b> Dan Karlok		UK publicity title <b>Exposed: Beyond Burlesque</b>
<b>Editors</b> Beth B		
<b>Original Music</b> Jim Coleman	<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]	
<b>Re-recording Mixer</b> Sean Garnhart	<b>Distributor</b> Matchbox Films/	
©B Productions, Inc.		

A documentary about some of the leading performers of New York's alternative burlesque scene, broadly defined as live performance involving nudity with elements of satire. Bunny Love, Mat Fraser, World Famous \*BOB\*, Rose Wood, Tigger!, Dirty Martini, Julie Atlas Muz and Bambi the Mermaid are seen performing acts from their repertoires and are interviewed about their lives and work. Areas of discussion include the difference between burlesque and stripping, the expressive and transgressive power of nudity and the advantages of membership of a tribe of likeminded peers.

## Fanny

France 2012  
Director: Daniel Auteuil  
Certificate PG 101m 53s

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Daniel Auteuil's *Fanny*, the sequel to his *Marius*, uses the same location and cast as the first film. We are still in Marseille's old harbour, where César (Auteuil) runs his bar next to the ship's chandler shop belonging to his old friend Panisse (Jean-Pierre Darroussin). But now he discovers that his beloved son Marius (Raphaël Personnaz) has left on a ship bound for a round-the-world trip, leaving his girlfriend Fanny (Victoire Bélézy) pregnant. The story that unfolds, as signalled by the film's title, shifts the emphasis on to the melodrama of the 'fallen woman': Fanny accepts Panisse's offer of marriage, egged on by her mother and aunt so that her child can 'have a name'. When Marius returns, arrogantly claiming wife and child, he is rebuffed by Fanny but also by his father, both recognising that the child belongs to Panisse more than to him. Marius has no option but to return to sea.

As in his *Marius*, Auteuil follows closely the original 1932 *Fanny* by Marcel Pagnol, which, legend has it, Pagnol wrote in response to popular demand after the triumph of the original *Marius* on stage and then on film (directed by Alexander Korda). *Fanny* also inaugurated Pagnol's obsession with the drama of the fallen woman (and single mother), which he would reprise in *Angèle* (1934) and *The Well-Digger's Daughter* (1940). Back in the 30s, the story was both retrograde in its inability to imagine a woman outside her role as mother, and modern in interesting ways. First, the explicit discussion of the 'contract' between Fanny and Panisse, seen as an exchange of her youth and fertility for his money, laid bare women's position in 1930s France; second, in its recognition that Panisse's role as carer is more important than Marius's biological function, the (original) film showed a pragmatic wisdom that was quite advanced for its time. Today, of course, in an era when unmarried mothers are a common occurrence and seen not as shameful but in need of support, Auteuil's film can only seem at best quaint and at worst nostalgic. The sense of unease comes in part from the evident modernity of the (excellent) young actress Victoire Bélézy as Fanny.

For the older cinephile, Auteuil's project to adapt Pagnol (he also directed a version of *The Well-Digger's Daughter* in 2011) constantly runs

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Alain Sarde Jérôme Seydoux	<b>Original Music</b> Alexandre Desplat	Alain Sarde and Jérôme Seydoux present an A.S. Films, Zack Films, Pathé co-production	Alpes Côte d'Azur In partnership with Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée	Panisse Raphaël Personnaz Marius Marie-Anne Chazel Honorine Nicolas Vaude Monsieur Brun Daniel Russo Escartefigue Ariane Ascaride Claudine Jean-Louis Barcelona Friseupoulet	<b>Dolby Digital</b> In Colour [1.85:1] Subtitles
<b>Written by</b> Daniel Auteuil Based on the play by Marcel Pagnol	<b>Sound</b> Henri Morelle Jean Goudier Thomas Gauder	With the participation of Canal+ and Ciné+ In association with La Banque Postale Image 6, Palatine Étoile 10, Indéfim, COFIMAGE 24 With the support of La Région Provence			
<b>Director of Photography</b> Jean-François Robin	<b>Costume Designer</b> Pierre-Yves Gayraud				
<b>Editor</b> Joëlle Hache	<b>Production Companies</b> ©A.S. Films, Zack Films, Pathé Production				
<b>Production Designer</b> Christian Marti					
			<b>Cast</b> Daniel Auteuil César Victoire Bélézy Jean-Pierre Darroussin	<b>Distributor</b> Pathé Productions	<b>9,169ft +8 frames</b>

Marseille, the 1930s. After her lover Marius leaves for the high seas, Fanny finds herself pregnant. She accepts an offer of marriage from the older Panisse in order to avoid the shame of being an unmarried mother. In this she is encouraged by her mother and aunt but criticised by Marius's father César, who wants her to wait for Marius's return.



Lock and quay: Bélézy, Darroussin

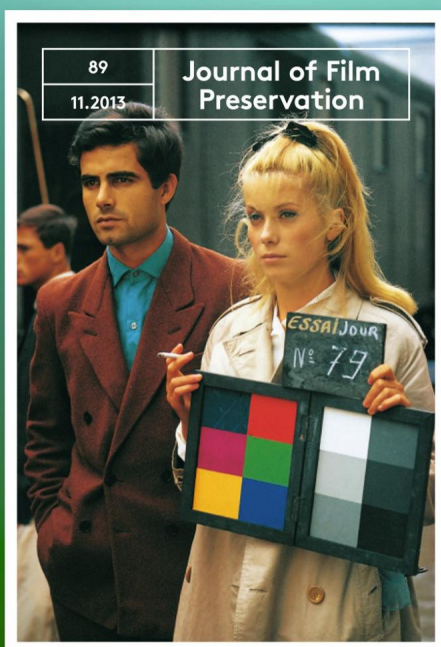
the risk of unfavourable comparison with the original films, particularly so with *Marius* and *Fanny*. Pagnol's manifest theatricality demanded flamboyant performers, which Raimu as César and Fernand Charpin as Panisse definitely were. Part of the point was the diction of the two *monstres sacrés* (it is still possible to buy CDs of them reciting tirades from the films), supported by genuine southern accents honed on the Marseille and Toulon stages. Competent as Auteuil, Darroussin and the rest of the cast are, they cannot compete in these stakes, especially as, with the exception of Auteuil's, their accents seem quite forced. Perhaps it doesn't matter for the younger generations, for whom Pagnol is a distant figure (even in France) and whose reference point is more likely to be the Claude Berri and Yves Robert adaptations of the 1980s and 1990s, such as *Jean de Florette*, *Manon des sources*, *La Gloire de mon père* and *Le Château de ma mère*.

Auteuil's *Fanny* is a competent, well-acted rendering of the story. It is pleasant enough to watch, largely because of Pagnol's unerring sense of a good story, however outdated, and especially the quality and wit of his dialogue. So Auteuil, despite the quibbles, is on to a good thing, and no doubt audiences will also want to see his *César*, which concludes the trilogy and which is expected shortly. **S**

Fanny marries Panisse and all are reconciled when a baby boy is born. A year later Marius returns and wants to claim Fanny and his son. Fanny rejects him, although she still loves him. She is supported by César, who argues that Panisse is the boy's 'real' father because he has looked after him and given him a name. Marius leaves for the high seas again.



# Journal of Film Preservation



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# Floating Skyscrapers

Poland 2013  
Director: Tomasz Wasilewski  
Certificate 18 93m 17s



Swimming against the tide: Marta Nieradkiewicz, Mateusz Banasiuk

## Reviewed by Michael Brooke

At the Cannes premiere of Tomasz Wasilewski's second feature, its writer-director claimed that it was Poland's first gay film. Although a slight exaggeration (his former boss Malgorzata Szumowska had already premiered *In the Name Of* in Berlin), the mere fact that he could make such an assertion with a straight face shows how far behind the west Polish cinema is when it comes to dealing upfront and graphically with LGBT material – which perhaps explains the film's occasionally awkward combination of visual fluency and psychological hesitancy.

Protagonist Kuba (Mateusz Banasiuk) is a swimmer with championship potential who shares a flat with his mother Ewa (Katarzyna Herman) and girlfriend Sylwia (Marta Nieradkiewicz) and devotes almost every waking hour to training, only occasionally satisfying his bi-curious side at the gym. But when he meets Michal (Bartosz Gelner), Kuba finds himself smitten in a way that he has clearly never experienced before.

So far so extremely familiar, but this triangular scenario turns out to be the least interesting aspect of a film that at least partially builds on the promise Wasilewski showed with his 2012 debut *In a Bedroom*. That was about a woman (Herman again) who was more interested in the environments her one-night stands inhabited than in the men themselves. This already evident fascination with both interior and exterior space permeates the whole of *Floating Skyscrapers* (including the title), and Wasilewski and cinematographer Jakub Kijowski are constantly alert to the compositional possibilities offered by swimming pools, urban skylines and car parks – indeed, the opening shot of a row of toilet doors is turned into a strikingly abstract widescreen composition thanks to their thick black borders. Wasilewski does something similar with his actors' bodies – at

one point, Kuba uses the cleft of Sylwia's pubis as a seemingly purpose-moulded chin-rest, while a troupe of synchronised swimmers is initially shown from below the waterline.

This keeps the film visually compelling during the times when not much else is happening. Because Kuba and Michal are the most taciturn of the major characters, their growing relationship is mainly depicted through the usual clichés of sharing a joint, hitching a ride on a goods train and having what in Polish-cinema terms is startlingly graphic sex. Sylwia and especially Ewa, the increasingly neglected women in Kuba's life, have more to say, while Michal's fleetingly

glimpsed relationship with his family is a deft microcosm of the usual coming-out challenges. Even his notionally highly sympathetic mother (Izabela Kuna), though delighted that he's found a soulmate, nonetheless recommends maintaining public links with an ex-girlfriend.

Unlike *In the Name Of*, the film has little wider social or cultural context: even a vicious queer-bashing is motivated at least as much by sexual jealousy as by overt homophobia – although the decision to end the film with Kuba having sullenly succumbed to the forces of convention provides eloquent enough commentary in itself. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Producers

Roman Jarosz  
Izabela Igel

### Written by

Tomasz Wasilewski

### Director of Photography

Kuba Kijowski

### Editor

Aleksandra Gowin

### Production Designer

Jacek Czechowski

### Music

Baasch

### Sound

Maciej Pawlowski

Tomasz Duskzta

### Costumes

Monika Kaleta

©Alter Ego Pictures

Sp. Z o.o., Film

Point Group, Super

Krak S.A., Studio

Q Katarzyna

Marciniwicz,

Soundplace Sp.

Z o.o., Modbut,

Muzyczne Studio

Produkcijne Spot

S.C., Trailerandmore

S.C., Natalia Siwicka

Production

Companies

An Alter Ego, Polski

Instytut Sztuki

Filmowej production

in co-operation

with Super Krak,

Studio Q Katarzyna

Marciniwicz,

Soundplace,

Muzyczne Studio

Produkcijne Spot,

Trailerandmore,

Natalia Siwicka

Co-financed by

Polski Instytut

Sztuki Filmowej

### Cast

Mateusz Banasiuk

Kuba

Marta Nieradkiewicz

Sylwia

Bartosz Gelner

Michal

Katarzyna Herman

Ewa

Olga Frycz

Monika

Iza Kuna

Krystyna

Mirosław Zbrojewicz

Jacek

Mariusz Drezek

coach

Katarzyna Maciag

Ania

Michal Grzybowski

Pawel

Michal Podsiadlo

Witek

Aleksandra Bednarz

Weronika

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Matchbox Films/

Verve Pictures

8,395 ft +8 frames

Polish theatrical title

Płynące wieżowce

Warsaw, the present. A potential champion swimmer, Kuba spares the occasional moment for Sylwia, his girlfriend of two years. Reluctantly accompanying her to an art exhibition, Kuba strikes up a conversation with Michal. Kuba and Sylwia live with Kuba's mother Ewa, who often bickers with Sylwia. Kuba eyes up a man in the gym shower, and they have sex in a toilet stall. Michal invites Kuba out and they share a joint. They then spend a day together, hitching a ride on a goods train, after which Kuba masturbates. Kuba invites Michal round to the flat for a meal, which is dominated by Sylwia's silent resentment. Michal's mother is delighted that her son has a boyfriend but she recommends being seen in public with a female friend. Kuba deliberately sabotages his chances of being picked for the swimming team, and later beats up the man from the gym. Ewa angrily asks Kuba why he wasted 15 years' training. Michal comes out to the rest of his family, who ignore the news. Michal accompanies Kuba and Sylwia on a lakeside trip: while Kuba swims, Sylwia grills Michal about his intentions. Following a party, Sylwia asks Kuba whether he and Michal had sex. As Kuba's relationship with Michal intensifies, Ewa reveals that Sylwia is pregnant. Kuba rings Michal and breaks it off. Michal is approached by the man from Kuba's gym. Following him in the expectation of sexual relief, he is brutally beaten up by a gang. Kuba and Sylwia silently share a bath.



## Flu

South Korea 2013  
Director: Kim Sungsoo  
Certificate 15 121m 48s

### Reviewed by Tony Rayns

No surprise that Kim Sungsoo's pandemic movie is not much like earlier examples of the genre, from Kazan's *Panic in the Streets* to Fukasaku's *Virus* and Soderbergh's *Contagion*, even if it shares elements with all of them. *The Flu* (so titled in English on the print, though it's just *Flu* in the ads) is a quintessentially Korean movie of the moment. It's paced like a ferret on speed, it's dynamically staged and its integration of CGI is expertly seamless. Lessons have been learnt from Paul Greengrass movies. But it's very Korean in other ways too: in its assumptions about Korean politicians and American power and tactics, in its shadow-memories of real-life civil emergencies in Korea and, not least, in its mix of hysterical melodrama and low comedy. It sets out to give viewers 'an experience' and stops at nothing to make sure that it delivers.

When SARS struck Hong Kong in 2003, Korea was famously the only country in the region left untouched. *The Flu* imagines a mutated avian-flu virus reaching Korea from Hong Kong, carried by a container-load of illegal Filipino migrants, most of whom die en route. The sole survivor escapes into Bundang, a typical 'new city' development near Seoul; he and two human traffickers spread the virus rapidly and it kills most of the infected within hours. Three days later Bundang is in lockdown, isolated from the rest of the country, with the local stadium pressed into service as a quarantine camp, medical and political establishments clashing over strategy and ugly Americans threatening to drop bombs. The second half of Bong Joonho's *The Host* envisaged something quite similar, but when a hawkish minister orders troops to open fire on unarmed protesters the film is unmistakably conjuring memories of real-life dictatorial crackdowns on outraged citizens, particularly the notorious massacre on the streets of Gwangju in 1980.

Genre rules dictate that this 'big picture' must mesh with the small-scale story of the protagonists. The plotting weaves them in and



Cold sweat: Su Ae

out of the escalating political and civil crisis rather well, but Kim and co-writer Lee Yeongjong falter in the characterisations. The man is an 'ordinary Joe', an emergency-rescue worker who remains miraculously virus-free despite carrying an infected child for long stretches; essentially blank, he's likeably played by Jang Hyeok. The woman is more problematic; a hospital doctor who has apparently despised men since her husband walked out, and who breaks every clause of the Hippocratic oath to save her infected daughter. The role is fundamentally absurd, and it's not Su Ae's fault that it makes no sense – especially when she also has to lurch from panic in the face of imminent death to girlish shyness in five seconds flat, to supposedly comic effect. The sexual banter between supporting characters is equally wearisome and unfunny. Kim Sungsoo made one of the seminal films protesting against Korea's bad old days under martial law (*Dead End*, 1993) and his political heart remains in the right place. But he needs to find a smarter writer. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Teddy Jung  
**Producer**  
Kim Seongjin  
**Screenplay**  
Lee Yeongjong  
Kim Sungsoo  
**Original Story**  
Jung Jaeho  
**Cinematographer**  
Lee Mogae

**Editor**  
Nam Nayoung  
**Production Designer**  
Park Ilhyeon  
**Music**  
Kim Taesung  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Lee Byungha  
**Costume Designer**  
Kim Kyeongmi

©CJ E&M Corporation  
**Production Companies**  
CJ Entertainment  
presents a iLove  
Cinema/iFilm  
production  
A Kim Sungsoo film  
**Executive Producer**  
Jeong Taesung

**Cast**  
Jang Hyeok  
Kang Jigu  
Su Ae  
Kim Inhye  
Yoo Haejin  
Kyungup  
Ma Dongsuk  
Gukhwan  
Lee Huijoon  
Byungki

**Park Minha**  
Mirre  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**  
**Distributor**  
CJ Entertainment  
**10,962 ft +0 frames**

Korean theatrical title  
**Gamgi**  
Onscreen English  
subtitle  
**The Flu**

April 2014. Filipino economic migrants (one of them seriously ill) are transported in a container from Hong Kong to South Korea.

1 May, Bundang (15km from Seoul). Emergency Response Team volunteer Kang Jigu rescues woman doctor Kim Inhye from a life-threatening accident; despite her ingratitude, he's smitten and soon learns that her husband has left her. The thuggish Ju opens the container in Pyeongtaek Harbour and finds all but one of the Filipinos dead inside; the survivor Monssai flees into Bundang.

2 May. A mutated avian flu virus starts spreading rapidly; people die and local politicians clash with medics over how to contain the epidemic. Inhye's precocious infant daughter Mirre encounters Monssai

and is infected while trying to help him. The president arrives in Bundang as the city is locked down and quarantined; US personnel step in to assert their authority. Amid social chaos, Jigu manages to reunite Inhye with Mirre, but all of them are interned in a quarantine camp, where Inhye conceals Mirre's infection.

5 May. Monssai is found and rushed to hospital to isolate the antibodies in his system; Inhye steals a sample of the untested vaccine to inject Mirre, but mother and child are separated. Monssai is killed by Ju. Jigu rescues Mirre and reunites her with Inhye at the cordon isolating Bundang as the president orders a ceasefire and faces down the Americans. The recovering Mirre is found to have the antibody that will save Bundang – and Korea.

## Free Birds

USA 2013  
Director: Jimmy Hayward  
Certificate U 90m 56s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

A pointlessly overcomplicated plot replete with potholes spoils this otherwise more than passably witty holiday-animation offering from director Jimmy Hayward, best known for the bubbly and charming Dr Seuss adaptation *Horton Hears a Who!* (2008). Its rote save-the-nest comedy feels like an amped-up version of *Antz* (1998), particularly since Owen Wilson's Reggie, the only smart fowl in the flock, has a distinctly Woody Allen inflection.

Utterly workmanlike animation, an unsubtle colour palette and unexceptional use of 3D mean that the film offers up limited visual pleasures. But the script, apart from a few dips into puerility (the invention of pizza toppings is a low point, as is the thudding product placement for Chuck E. Cheese's), has a warm, unforced humour. The voice work is also surprisingly enjoyable, with Woody Harrelson's dumb but indefatigable bird Jake making a fine relaxed double-act with the wisecracking Wilson. Only Amy Poehler seems short-changed, shoehorned into a self-reliant love-interest role that doesn't take full advantage of her comic talents. ☹



### Free Birds

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Scott Mosier  
**Screenplay**  
Scott Mosier  
Jimmy Hayward  
**Story**  
David I. Stern  
John J. Strauss  
**Editor**  
Chris Cartagena  
**Production Designer**  
Kevin R. Adams  
**Music**  
Dominic Lewis  
**Sound Designer**  
Randy Thom  
**Supervising Animator**  
Rich McKain

©Buck McDonald  
Productions, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Reel FX Film Fund  
and Relativity Media

present a Relativity  
Media and Reel FX  
Animation Studios  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Aron Warner  
John J. Strauss  
David I. Stern

**Voice Cast**  
Owen Wilson  
Reggie  
Woody Harrelson  
Jake  
Amy Poehler  
Jenny  
George Takei  
S.T.E.V.E.  
Colm Meaney  
Myles Standish  
Keith David  
Chief Broadbeak  
Dan Fogler  
Governor Bradford  
Jimmy Hayward

Ranger  
Kaitlyn Maher  
President's daughter  
Carlos Alazraqui  
Amos  
Jimmy Hayward  
Leatherbeak  
Jeff Biancalana  
General Saga  
Jimmy Hayward  
President  
Danny Carey  
Danny  
Carlos Ponce  
narrator/Alejandro

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Some screenings presented in 3D**  
**Distributor**  
El Films  
**8,184 ft +0 frames**

US, present day. Reggie, the Thanksgiving presidential pardon turkey, is kidnapped by eccentric bird Jake. Together they hijack a secret time machine and return to November 1621 to prevent turkeys becoming the traditional Thanksgiving meal. Hiding out with a wild turkey flock, Reggie falls for feisty Jenny. Jake's bungled assault on the Puritans' fort leads human hunters to the wild turkeys' nest. When Jenny's father is killed saving the flock, she plans an assault on the fort to rescue the captured birds. Reggie escapes to his own time but finds other-era Reggies have returned to urge him to save the wild turkeys. Using time travel, Reggie provides pizza as the Thanksgiving meal for humans and turkeys alike. Reggie and Jenny remain in 1621. Jake continues to battle for justice using time travel.

## Frozen

USA 2013  
Directors: Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee  
Certificate PG 108m 2s

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Disney characters have had, in recent years, a shined, rubber look in their poster campaigns, which can be off-putting. Sisters Elsa and Anna, the protagonists of *Frozen*, look as lifeless as chew toys but thankfully prove capable of expressiveness in action.

This comedy-musical spin on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen* is aimed at a target audience of young girls but has appeal for both sexes, and adults too. Anna is a spry, garrulous, glass-half-full heroine. Ungainly in the presence of boys, she's a cutting off actress Emma Stone, whose gift of the gaffe makes her popular with young women. Olaf (Josh Gad), a buck-toothed snowman with tremendous comic timing, suffers the same charmed ignorance of his 'genetic' makeup as Will Ferrell did in *Elf* (2003).

The plotting is occasionally harebrained, but otherwise this is a fast-paced, fun-packed adventure, set against ice and snowscapes that impress with their surprising variability. There's merit in the musical numbers too, and the extraordinary vocal talent of Idina Menzel as Elsa is something the film can really boast about. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Peter Del Vecho  
**Screenplay**  
Jennifer Lee  
**Story**  
Chris Buck  
Jennifer Lee  
Shane Morris  
Story inspired by *The Snow Queen* by Hans Christian Andersen  
**Directors of Cinematography**  
Layout: Scott Beattie  
Lighting: Mohit Kallianpur  
**Editor**  
Jeff Draheim  
**Production Designer**  
David Womersley  
**Original Songs**  
Kristin Anderson-Lopez  
Robert Lopez  
**Original Score**  
Christophe Beck  
**Supervising Sound Editor/Sound Designer**  
Odin Benitez  
**Head of Animation**  
Lino Di Salvo

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**Production Companies**  
Disney presents  
Logo: Walt Disney Animation Studios  
**Executive Producer**  
John Lasseter

### Voice Cast

**Kristen Bell**  
Anna  
**Idina Menzel**  
Elsa  
**Jonathan Groff**  
Kristoff  
**Josh Gad**  
Olaf  
**Santino Fontana**  
Hans  
**Alan Tudyk**  
duke  
**Ciarán Hinds**  
Pabbie/Grandpa  
**Chris Williams**  
Oaken  
**Stephen John Anderson**  
Kai  
**Maia Wilson**  
Bulda  
**Edie McClurg**  
Gerda

**Dolby Atmos**  
In Colour

**Prints by**  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]  
**Some screenings presented in 3D**  
**Distributor**  
Buena Vista International (UK)  
**9,723 ft +0 frames**

The kingdom of Arendelle. Royal sisters Anna and Elsa are inseparable, but when Anna is harmed by Elsa's ability to turn anything she touches to ice, her memory of Elsa's power is erased and Elsa is locked away. The kingdom's gates reopen on Elsa's coronation day. Anna becomes engaged to Hans, causing Elsa to lose control of her power and cast a spell bringing eternal winter to Arendelle. Fleeing to the mountains, Elsa embraces her magic. Anna searches for Elsa, helped by ice salesman Kristoff, reindeer Sven and Olaf the Snowman. Struck in the heart by Elsa's ice, Anna will die unless saved by an act of true love. Hans tells Anna that he wants Arendelle, not her. When Hans tries to strike Elsa with his sword, an ailing Anna throws herself in front of her sister. Her sacrifice breaks the spell. Kristoff and Anna share a kiss, and the sisters are reconciled.

## Homefront

Director: Gary Fleder  
Certificate 15 100m 21s

### Reviewed by Ashley Clark

With its surface combination of zeitgeisty elements including crystal meth (*Breaking Bad*), a post-Katrina New Orleans setting (*Treme*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Bullet to the Head*) and James Franco (where to begin?), one could be forgiven for imagining that Gary Fleder's thriller *Homefront* might try its hand at something vaguely contemporary. However, saddled with a formulaic script from Sylvester Stallone (adapted from Chuck Logan's novel) and a strictly functional aesthetic sensibility, it soon reveals its true, retrograde self.

*Homefront*'s ultimate embrace of risk-averse mediocrity is a shame, because for its opening half an hour it broaches some genuinely intriguing themes. When Jason Statham's hardcase DEA agent Broker rolls into a new town with his tough daughter in tow, it isn't hoodlums and drug dealers he initially needs to worry about. Rather, the chief aggressor is a severely de-glammed Kate Bosworth, enjoyably chewing scenery as Cassie, the white-trash meth-head mother from hell. With Cassie stomping around, putting menfolk in their place ("You are a motherfucking pussy!" she informs her husband), an unusual, unpredictable dynamic is established, and is further underscored by putting Broker up against Southern codes of honour. These early moments recall a down-home spin on Roman Polanski's *Carnage* (adults behaving appallingly following an incident involving their children) blended with the social-pariah narrative of Thomas Vinterberg's *The Hunt*; there is an unsettling, almost pagan, charge in the air.

Sadly, Stallone and Fleder aren't overly interested in exploring these tricky dynamics and junk any attempt at social commentary when the heavies arrive and the fighting 'n' macho shit-talking commences. Left floundering in this dull soup are, as meth-dealer Gator, a beefed-up, uneasy-looking Franco (whose lack of anything substantial to do is made less palatable by memories of his exuberant recent turn as Alien in *Spring Breakers*) and Winona Ryder, who is treated with shockingly little respect by



I'll stand bayou: James Franco

the filmmakers: she arrives after 45 minutes and by the end of the 46th she's been bent over a car bonnet and roughly taken from behind by Gator. Elsewhere the film is comically dated; most egregiously, Broker gets a wisecracking black buddy (Omar Benson Miller) who is only too happy to put himself in the line of fire for his infinitely more important white pal.

Yet the film's biggest problem lies with the performance of leading man Statham, whose brand of implacable indestructibility is never tempered by the sort of madcap trimmings offered by Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor in the berserk *Crank* films. One never fears for the lugubrious Broker's eventual safety, even when he's trussed up like a hog with his head submerged in a vat of water. His invincibility is a fait accompli. Without any further subtextual flavouring to speak of, where does the suspense come from? Broker's most extraordinary quality instead seems to be his uncanny ability to summon up the sound of a plangent acoustic guitar simply by staring soulfully into the middle distance.

*Homefront*, then, is a blandly serviceable stew, although it does carry one note of teasing ambiguity: from the first minute to the last, I genuinely couldn't tell whether Statham was attempting an American accent or not. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Kevin King-Templeton  
Sylvester Stallone  
John Thompson  
**Screenplay**  
Sylvester Stallone  
Based on the novel by Chuck Logan  
**Director of Photography**  
Theo van de Sande  
**Editor**  
Padraic McKinley  
**Production Designer**  
Greg Berry  
**Music**  
Mark Isham  
**Sound Recordists**  
Jesse Ehredt  
Tim Limer  
**Costume Designer**  
Kelli Jones

**Production Companies**  
Open Road Films, Endgame

Entertainment and Millennium Films present a Gary Fleder film  
**Executive Producers**  
Avi Lerner  
Trevor Short  
Boaz Davidson  
René Besson  
Mark Gill  
James D. Stern  
Douglas E. Hansen

**Cast**  
Jason Statham  
Phil Broker  
James Franco  
Gator Bodine  
Winona Ryder  
Sheryl Gott  
Kate Bosworth  
Cassie Bodine  
Rachelle Lefevre  
Susan Hatch  
Frank Grillo  
Cyrus, 'Sarge'

Clancy Brown  
sheriff  
Izabella Vidovic  
Mattie Broker

**Dolby Digital/ Datasat**  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

9,031 ft +8 frames

New Orleans, present day. Having played a key role in the busting of a meth ring two years earlier, low-level DEA agent Phil Broker has moved house to begin a new life with his young daughter Maddy. Broker comes into conflict with Cassie, the mother of a boy bested by Maddy in a violent playground altercation. Word spreads, and Broker consequently comes under attack from a number of the townsfolk, though he successfully fends them off. Cassie's brother Gator, a local meth kingpin, snoops around Broker's house and finds files confirming his identity as a DEA agent. Gator hatches a plan: in exchange for a wider distribution network he will hand Broker to the meth ring. Gator brings in old friend Sheryl to help him make the deal. Gator sends his thugs to Broker's house but Broker fights them off. Annoyed, the gang take Sheryl as insurance and attempt to find Broker themselves. Broker kills them all. A panicked Sheryl abducts Maddy, to Gator's dismay. Following an altercation in which Cassie implores Sheryl to return Maddy, a furious Gator shoots Cassie (who survives) and runs off with Maddy. Broker catches up with Gator and disarms him. Gator is arrested and Broker reunites with his daughter.



## How to Make Money Selling Drugs

Director: Matthew Cooke

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

The feature debut of former web entrepreneur Matthew Cooke, the provocatively titled documentary *How to Make Money Selling Drugs* initially seems to be offering impressively thorough advice on how to do just that, in a way that potentially challenges the BBFC guidelines (which previously led to the rejection of such videos as *High-Yield Hydroponic Systems*, *Introduction to Indoor Growing*, *Mushroom Growing Made Easy* and *The Hash Man*).

In the style of a multi-level videogame, the 'player' (viewer) progresses from street dealer to international cartel lord, with various contributors drawing on their experience of dealing, smuggling, law enforcement and/or reporting to offer sage advice – for instance, if the police ask you to become an informer, it's best to name innocent people, as guilty parties are more likely to have friends with big guns.

But what initially appears hair-raisingly irresponsible turns out to have a far more directly polemical purpose, as Cooke demonstrates that the US government has comprehensively mastered these tactics and that Richard Nixon's still ongoing 'war on drugs' is now skewing everything from the prison population to the US economy while effectively gerrymandering elections by offering substantial funding to anyone prepared to take a strong anti-drugs line.


The flashy graphics take a back seat to a sober analysis of the underlying issues. Clips from HBO's celebrated series *The Wire* (2002-08) initially add entertaining colour, before their



Cash converter: *How to Make Money Selling Drugs*

creator, former court reporter David Simon, explains that one side-effect of the war on drugs is that while the police are great at drug arrests (for which they're handsomely recompensed), they're forgetting how to do more mundane but equally essential parts of their job. Meanwhile the dire economic situation in swathes of the country makes some level of involvement in the industry (as buyer or seller) very hard to resist.

Draconian laws incarcerate small-time dealers for 75 years, and possibly innocent people serve lengthy sentences merely for being present in a house subjected to a successful drugs bust. Former cop Barry Cooper reminisces about tactics: 15 heavily armed men invade what may well be the wrong house and it's "one of the most terrifying things a human being could go through". The film is studded with celebrity cameos – former drug dealer 50 Cent, former Vicodin addict Eminem, 'freedom enthusiast' Woody Harrelson, Susan Sarandon, Arianna Huffington – but they get less screen time than the people who've been at the sharp end of the drugs trade.

As satire, Cooke's film is bludgeoning. Chris Morris's *C4 Brass Eye* episode 'Drugs' (1997) far more memorably highlighted the absurdities of official positions, and there's nothing here to match the weird poetry of 'Shatner's Bassoon' or the invented street slang burred by Margaret Thatcher's former press secretary Sir Bernard Ingham. But given Cooke's purpose, subtlety might have been counterproductive: though his arguments will be wearily familiar to those who have already assessed the many contradictions inherent in US drug policy, his concentration of damning evidence makes it hard to react in any way other than anger at the waste of money, lives and entire societies. And while Cooke only superficially covers the topic of legalisation and regulation (not least by ignoring the arguments against), it's hard to disagree with him that the present situation makes Prohibition seem like a model of sensible public policy. 

## The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

Director: Francis Lawrence  
Certificate 12A 146m 2s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

It's testament, perhaps, to the timeliness of *The Hunger Games* adaptations – about an uprising among the 99 per cent, crystallised around a participant in a media spectacle – that a panoply of distinguished character actors have taken on cameo roles. *Catching Fire*, the second film to come from Suzanne Collins's fantasy trilogy (following 2012's *The Hunger Games*), adds scene-stealing performances from Philip Seymour Hoffman as double agent Plutarch Heavensbee, and from Jeffrey Wright, Amanda Plummer and Jena Malone as heroine Katniss Everdeen's allies in the games, as well as returnees Donald Sutherland as bad guy President Snow, Stanley Tucci as hyperbolic TV presenter Caesar Flickerman and Woody Harrelson as wildcard mentor Haymitch Abernathy. These performances, along with Jennifer Lawrence's raw and vital turn as Katniss, the competitor whose unlikely victory inspires an uprising, invest the often flimsy world of Panem with compelling drama.

For all the talent invested, though, the film only fitfully catches fire. Katniss's love interests – fellow contestant Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) and guy-back-home Gale (Liam Hemsworth) – are winsome and wooden respectively. Indeed, Katniss has more chemistry with her stylist Cinna, played by Lenny Kravitz. It helps that Cinna's designs, which involve setting Katniss's dress on fire and turning it into a bird, are striking and poetic, in contrast to the violent FX elsewhere. Moreover, Katniss and Cinna's dialogue is characterful, unlike most of the action-driven narrative condensed from the book.

The awkward structure is the major dampener, with key plot points overtly signalled by exposition, and the whole thing draggily paced at 146 minutes. It's also too close a repetition of the first film, as Katniss is again relocated from poor rural District 12 to the wealthy, decadent Capitol in order to compete in and win the games. Yet *Catching Fire* lacks the earlier film's ruthless, compelling logic. Katniss and Peeta's victory tour delays and compresses the games themselves into a brief third act, in which the assault is so relentless as to be meaningless. The film seems to go through the motions – and suggests that Katniss is doing the same – in order to get to the denouement of its sequel, *Mockingjay*.

Powerful moments, particularly the violent deaths of Katniss's allies, are rushed and compromised by the focus on plot mechanics. At one point, two older female contestants sacrifice themselves for Katniss, adding to a disturbing trend in which the more diverse minor characters die first. The murder of a protester in District 11 and the beating handed out to Cinna are the most dramatic examples: two black characters killed in order to spur on the white protagonist and engage audience sympathy for her. In Collins's books, Katniss is described as dark-skinned, and she has been widely read as Native American, while neither Cinna nor the people of District 11 are represented as African American.

This race-lifting is indicative of the ambivalence about social change at the heart of *The Hunger Games*. Katniss is a powerful female lead but she is also utterly reactive, manipulated first by Snow and then by 

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Bert Marcus	Onnalee Blank	<b>Matthew Cooke</b>
<b>Producer</b> Adrian Grenier	@[none given]	<b>In Colour and</b> <b>Black and White</b> [1.85:1]
<b>Cinematographer</b> Matthew Cooke	<b>Production Companies</b> Bert Marcus Productions presents in association with Reckless Productions	<b>Distributor</b> Vertigo Films
<b>Edited by</b> Matthew Cooke Jeff Cowan		
<b>Music</b> <b>Composed by</b> Spencer Nezey		
<b>Re-Recording Mixer</b>	narrated by	

A documentary about the drugs business in the US, initially presented as a satirical videogame-style 'instruction manual' in which the would-be drug dealer advances up seven levels ('Getting Started', 'The Pawn', 'Private Retailer', 'Domestic Distributor', 'International Smuggler', 'Kingpin', 'Cartel Lord'). At each level, the advantages and disadvantages are assessed by people with direct experience of the drugs trade, including dealers, smugglers, police officers, legal representatives, journalists, addicts and victims' relatives, all of whom offer advice (pack a gun, hire back-up, consider an exit strategy etc). As the 'game' progresses to the highest level, the US government enters as a surprise new player. The government has thoroughly mastered the game's tactics with the help of an exponentially increasing annual budget (\$65 million rising to \$25.2 billion in 40 years), and despite its spokespeople vehemently claiming otherwise, it has a vested interest in keeping the drugs trade going. The examples of tobacco regulation and Portugal's radical legalisation programme offer alternative approaches, which the US seems reluctant to contemplate despite evidence that the 'war on drugs' is the greatest failure of US public policy of the past 50 years.



Beaux and arrows: Josh Hutcherson, Elizabeth Banks, Jennifer Lawrence

← a male, all-white revolutionary group; Snow, and the repressive society he represents, are clearly configured as evil, yet revolution is fatally dangerous, if not impossible; and the film's focus on delivering the massive spectacle of the games counters the story's critique of just such a distracting display.

The world of the film is as see-through as the electromagnetic force field pointed out to Katniss by tech geek Wiress – a bit of unmotivated exposition that pays off when Katniss works out how to shatter a false sky with an arrow

charged with lightning, in a scene reminiscent of the end of *The Truman Show* (1998). But behind the shattered spectacle is further spectacle: a hovercraft that airlifts Katniss, in a direct visual quotation from Frodo's rescue at the climax of *The Return of the King* (2003). The speciousness of the film's claim to critique its own complicity in spectacle is underlined by the closing track from masters of fauxthenticity Coldplay: this is cinema as anthemic stadium pomp, seducing viewers hungry for something meaningful with a veneer of depth. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Nina Jacobson  
Jon Kilik  
**Screenplay**  
Simon Beaufoy  
Michael deBruyn  
Based upon the  
novel *Catching Fire*  
by Suzanne Collins  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Jo Willems  
**Editor**  
Alan Edward Bell  
**Production Designer**  
Philip Messina

**Music**  
James Newton  
Howard  
**Production**  
**Sound Mixer**  
Mark Weingarten  
**Costume Designer**  
Trish Summerville  
**Visual Effects**  
Double Negative  
Method Studios  
Rodeo FX  
Fuel FX  
Hybride  
Cantina Creative  
Whiskytree Inc

**Visual Effects**  
**and Animation**  
Weta Digital Ltd.  
**Supervising Stunt**  
**Co-ordinator**  
Chad Stahelski  
©Lions Gate Films Inc.  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Lionsgate presents  
a Color Force/  
Lionsgate production  
**Executive Producers**  
Suzanne Collins  
Louise Rosner-Meyer

Joe Drake  
Allison Shearmur

**Cast**  
**Jennifer Lawrence**  
Katniss Everdeen  
**Josh Hutcherson**  
Peeta Mellark  
**Liam Hemsworth**  
Gale Hawthorne  
**Woody Harrelson**  
Haymitch Abernathy  
**Elizabeth Banks**  
Effie Trinket  
**Lenny Kravitz**

Cinna  
**Philip Seymour Hoffman**  
Plutarch Heavensbee  
**Jeffrey Wright**  
Beetee  
**Sam Claflin**  
Finnick Odair  
**Jena Malone**  
Johanna Mason  
**Stanley Tucci**  
Caesar Flickerman  
**Donald Sutherland**  
President Snow  
**Dolby Digital/**

**Datasat/Dolby**  
**Atmos**  
**Colour and Prints by**  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK  
**13,143ft +0 frames**

In the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem, Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, joint winners of the televised Hunger Games, are sent on a victory tour. With the lives of her family and boyfriend Gale threatened by President Snow, Katniss is forced to continue faking her relationship with Peeta for the cameras. The tour sparks an uprising across Panem, with rebels adopting Katniss's mockingjay symbol. New gamemaker Plutarch Heavensbee proposes a Quarter Quell (a particularly difficult version of the games) in order to kill or discredit Katniss; other previous winners are also selected to compete. The competitors try unsuccessfully to have the Quarter Quell cancelled – Peeta claims that he and Katniss

are married and that she is pregnant. Katniss and Peeta both seek allies among the other competitors. Peeta is drawn to rebellious Johanna; Katniss's mentor Haymitch suggests golden boy Finnick, but Katniss dislikes Finnick's arrogance and instead seeks out elderly Mags and the clever partnership of Beetee and Wiress. During the games, which take place on a tropical island, Katniss realises her feelings for Peeta. With Wiress's assistance, she shatters the island's dome and is airlifted to safety. Reunited with Gale, she learns that Peeta has been taken to the Capitol, and that Plutarch, Haymitch and Finnick, working for the revolution, are taking her to the rebel base in District 13.

## Jackass Presents: Bad Grandpa

USA 2013, Director: Jeff Tremaine  
Certificate 15 91m 45s

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

Considering its almost primeval simplicity, the *Jackass* concept has proved surprisingly durable. A case perhaps of something so dumb it couldn't fail, its formula – young men performing bone-headed and usually bone-crackingly masochistic stunts for each other's amusement – might have been thought exhausted after its original incarnation as an MTV series that ran from just 2000 to 2001. Instead, like one of its rubber-skeletoned stars Bam Margera or Steve-O rebounding off the concrete bowl of an emptied swimming pool, it has come bouncing back every few years as a feature film (in 2002, 2006 and 2010).

*Jackass Presents: Bad Grandpa* (directed, like previous instalments, by Jeff Tremaine) reveals a few distinct shifts in approach, though. Rather than a gang performing gonzo stunts straight to camera, it has just one of the original group in the spotlight, Johnny Knoxville. Its set-ups are now all hidden-camera, and they're strung together into a fictional narrative: taking a character of Knoxville's – the drunken, lecherous but amiable 86-year-old Irving Zisman – it blends road movie with inter-generational buddy picture as he attempts to deliver his grandson Billy across country to the boy's neglectful loser of a father.

It would be very easy to knock *Bad Grandpa* for being puerile, but then puerile has a venerable history in comedy: think of the schoolboy streak in any number of classics, from *Airplane!* to Monty Python. There are moments in *Bad Grandpa* that you'd need a heart of stone not to laugh at – Zisman being flung bodily through a plate-glass window by a kids' ride-on airplane being one. There's a penis stuck in a vending machine here, some explosive flatulence there, and a half-cut pensioner wedged in a shopping trolley, gamely attempting to order from a drive-thru.

But as with any hidden-camera comedy, the gaze is directed at its 'victims', the onscreen spectators who don't realise they're performers; you are in essence laughing at them (and 'with' the makers). With that in mind, much of what *Bad Grandpa* probably takes to be freethinking provocation is often complacent crassness. Irving's repeated attempts to hit on women – in the street, in bars, in restaurants – are all variations on the theme of 'sexual harassment LOL'. You have to wonder how many women Knoxville had to pester before they got adequately funny and usable responses. Irving's preference for black women is repeatedly played on, most excruciatingly in the sequence where he crashes a ladies' night in a bar where he's the only white face. Tremaine and Knoxville might argue they're fearlessly probing taboo subjects that political correctness normally prevents us discussing. But when Irving edges up to a male stripper and asks if he "has a big Tootsie Roll", the icy response ("Fuck did you say to me?") is painful to witness. Put simply, *Bad Grandpa* 'kicks downwards', discomfiting women and black people for laughs when it could extract more of its comedy from the old white men like Irving who, generally speaking, do rather better out of society.

There is a warm and fuzzy side to *Bad Grandpa*, though: the tolerance with which people react



## Kill Your Darlings

USA 2013  
Director: John Krokidas  
Certificate 15 104m 11s

### Reviewed by Roger Clarke

At the heart of *Kill Your Darlings* is a forgotten Rimbaud-Radiguet archetype who inspired a generation. Lucien Carr, the man who put the heartbeat into the Beats, died in 2005. In its obituary, the *New York Times* dubbed him "a literary lion who never roared". Since then the race has been on to tell his story to a wider public – he was the charismatic St Louis private schoolboy whose establishment-baiting hunger for art and insubordination brought together William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, as well as lesser figures such as Hebert Huncke.

The film is set in 1944, on the campus of Columbia University, New York, where the 17-year-old Ginsberg takes up his studies and immediately falls in with Carr in a series of encounters that echo the Ryder/Flyte romance from *Brideshead Revisited*. Carr encourages Ginsberg to write and misbehave following a Rimbaud-style model of 'derangement of the senses' and 'first thought, best thought', and Ginsberg begins to fall in love with him. The film ends with the murder of another figure in this group, stalking ex-scoutmaster David Kammerer (Michael C. Hall), whom Carr dispatches with a scout knife through the heart (not coming to any US scouting histories soon). It is this murder, this blood-soaked disaster and shock, think many, that provided the crucible for Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac to write.

This is an accomplished debut feature from John Krokidas, and Dane DeHaan is perfectly cast as the incipiently hysterical bruised beauty who inadvertently creates an entire cultural movement. The film itself boasts campus origins – Krokidas began work on it at Yale with his fellow student and co-writer Austin Bunn. One of the key scenes, when august books in the display case of the library are switched for obscene ones, speaks more of their own experience than that of Columbia in 1944. The script is a good one, overheated at the beginning and then measured and collected.

Ginsberg is played with endearing, earnest conviction by Daniel Radcliffe, who evokes the poet's sheer good-heartedness. By all accounts, Radcliffe also suggested critical aspects of the



Hepcats: Daniel Radcliffe, Dane DeHaan

climactic gay sex scene, in which Ginsberg picks up someone who at least looks like Carr. (It could be argued too that this is the first film in which Radcliffe explores aspects of his Jewish heritage.) His misery at helping Carr defend himself from a serious murder charge, by insisting that Carr is straight, is palpable.

The scenes with Ginsberg's mentally disturbed mother (played by Jennifer Jason Leigh) are especially touching, and one would have liked to see more of them. Kerouac is played with lithe insouciance by Jack Huston, one of the Hollywood clan, but more interesting is Ben Foster as the introspective Burroughs, who at this point hasn't even decided to be a writer. It's not really suggested here, but Burroughs, who at the end of the film is whisked away from New York by his rich parents, was already falling in love with Ginsberg.

Problem points include a very misleading scene involving the Tristan Tzara-esque 'cut up', which has Burroughs and Ginsberg randomly destroying and tearing up books rather than forming carefully constructed collages on a wall. But it's a small quibble in a film that's handsomely photographed and produced, suffused with jazz hepcat vibes. At the very least it will direct a new generation of Harry Potter admirers to read some of Ginsberg's work, hopefully his masterpiece 'Kaddish'.



In latex life: Johnny Knoxville, Jackson Nicoll

to even Irving's most outrageous behaviour is remarkable. And Jackson Nicoll is excellent as eight-year-old grandson Billy. The film's finale borrows quite shamelessly from *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) but gets away with it (just) by not only lifting the scene in question but playing it out in a real situation, and taking it twice as far.

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Derek Freda  
Johnny Knoxville  
Spike Jonze  
Jeff Tremaine

#### Screenplay

Johnny Knoxville  
Spike Jonze  
Jeff Tremaine

#### Story

Johnny Knoxville  
Spike Jonze  
Jeff Tremaine  
Fax Bahr  
Adam Small

#### Director of Photography

Dimitry Elyashkevich

#### Edited by

Seth Casriel  
Matthew Probst  
Matthew Kosinski

#### Music

Sam Spiegel

#### Sound Mixer

Cordell Mansfield

#### Costume Designer

Lindsey T. Kear

#### Stunt Co-ordinator

Charles Grisham

#### @Paramount

Pictures Corporation

#### Production Companies

Paramount Pictures  
and MTV Films  
present a Dickhouse  
production

#### Executive Producer

Trip Taylor

#### Cast

Johnny Knoxville  
Irving Zisman  
Jackson Nicoll  
Billy

#### Greg Harris

Chuck

#### Georgina Cates

Kimmie

#### Kamber Hejlik

doctor

#### Jill Kill

pageant reporter

#### Madison Davis

Juggalo girl

#### George Faughnan

Juggalo guy

#### Grasie Mercedes

hostess

#### Marilynn Allain

receptionist

#### Jack Pollock

funeral worker

#### Spike Jonze

Gloria

#### Catherine Keener

Ellie

#### Dolby Digital/

Datasat

#### In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

Paramount

Pictures UK

8,257ft +8 frames

US, the present. Irving Zisman, 86, learns that his wife has passed away. Her funeral is interrupted by the arrival of Irving's daughter Kimmie with his grandson Billy. Kimmie reveals that she is about to go to prison, so Irving must take Billy to Raleigh, North Carolina, where he will be looked after by his estranged father. Irving reluctantly agrees. On their way across country Irving is constantly irritated and obstructed from his main concerns (drinking and womanising) by Billy's presence. The pair cause chaos as Irving abandons Billy to visit a ladies' night at a local bar, plays bingo, attempts to shoplift and uses Billy as a means to approach women. He gradually learns to appreciate his grandson, however, and after initially handing Billy over to his father – who makes clear that he only wants Billy in order to claim state child support – he has a change of heart. Irving drives away with Billy, aided by a local biker gang. Reunited, the pair cause further chaos by entering Billy in a child beauty pageant, before 'burying' Irving's wife by dropping her off a high bridge.

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Michael Benaroya  
Christine Vachon  
Rose Ganguzza  
John Krokidas

#### Written by

John Krokidas  
Austin Bunn

#### Story

Austin Bunn

#### Director of Photography

Reed Morano

#### Editor

Brian A. Kates

#### Production Designer

Stephen Carter

#### Composer

Nico Muhly

#### Sound Mixer

Ken Ishii

#### Costume Designer

Christopher Peterson

#### @KYD Films, LLC

Production

#### Companies

Benaroya Pictures  
presents a Killer  
Films production  
in association  
with Sunny Field  
Entertainment  
**Executive Producers**

Joe Jenckes

Stefan Sonnenfeld

Jared Ian Goldman

Pamela Koffler

Randy Manis

#### Cast

**Daniel Radcliffe**

Allen Ginsberg

**David Cross**

Louis Ginsberg

**Dane DeHaan**

Lucien Carr

**Ben Foster**

William Burroughs

**Michael C. Hall**

David Krammerer

**Jack Huston**

Jack Kerouac

#### Jennifer Jason Leigh

Naomi Ginsberg

**Elizabeth Olsen**

Edie Parker

**John Cullum**

Professor Steeves

**David Rasche**

Dean

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

The Works UK  
Distribution Ltd

9,376 ft +8 frames

New York, 1944. Seventeen-year-old Allen Ginsberg wins a place at Columbia University, where he meets charismatic but unstable fellow student Lucien Carr and falls in love with him. Also among Carr's circle of friends are the 29-year-old drifter and drugs experimenter William Burroughs and aspiring writer Jack Kerouac. An older man, David Kammerer, is infatuated with Carr. Swept up in this bohemian life,

Ginsberg neglects his mother, whose delicate mental state is tipped into crisis by his absence. Carr murders Kammerer, stabbing him through the heart and dumping the body in the Hudson River. Carr claims that it was an 'honour slaying', and that he was fending off an unwelcome homosexual advance. Ginsberg reluctantly helps him defend himself on this basis. He finds solace in the arms of a stranger who resembles Carr.

## Klown

Denmark 2010  
Director: Mikkel Nørgaard

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

*The Killing* and *The Bridge* have shown that the Danes can make thrillers as dark, taut and labyrinthine as anyone. The present film proves that they can equally compete on dumbass comedies: *Klown* makes your average Judd Apatow romp look like an intellectual exercise. Frank Hvam and Casper Christensen, well known in their native Denmark for their TV series *Casper & Mandrilaftalen* and *Klown* (the latter providing the spark for this movie version), play the kind of hapless child-men we've seen plenty of in recent years: socially and physically inept, goofily stuck in permanent adolescence, fixated on short-term gratification with no thought of possible consequences. Their womenfolk, of course, are mature, intelligent and permanently exasperated with the mendacious assholes they've improbably yoked themselves to.

The shambling plot of *Klown* involves Frank (the actors mostly keep their own names) kidnapping his girlfriend's 12-year-old nephew Bo and taking him on a canoeing trip to prove his own fitness to become a father. The humour, such as it is, mainly derives from the clash between Frank's misguided exercise in parenting and his friend Casper's plans for their trip to be a 'tour de pussy', compounded by the edgy discomfort of having a pre-teen boy witness the men's off-colour conversations and activities. Several scenes pivot on the supposedly modest dimensions of Bo's penis – at one point Frank and Casper photograph the inadequate organ while the boy's asleep so that they'll "have something on him". This may require some radical rewriting if the mooted US remake ever happens.

Jokes about a child's penis, you might think, are sinking pretty low, but *Klown* can get lower. Casper's technique for defusing anger in men



A useless life: Frank Hvam

he's annoyed – and he annoys a lot of them – is 'man flirting', touching them and giving off gay signals, only for one of them to take him at his word and rape him. And at one point Frank is advised that a good way to regain his girlfriend Mia's affection is to give her a 'pearl necklace' – ie ejaculate on her neck while she's sleeping. Frank duly follows this suggestion, though he fails to notice that the woman in the bed isn't Mia but her mother, who receives the load in her eye. For the rest of the film the elderly lady wears an eye-patch, just to make sure we haven't forgotten such a subtle gag. If *Klown* does get remade for the American market – apparently Danny McBride is pencilled in for the lead role – it might just prove one of those rare cases where the US version is better than the European original. After all, it could scarcely be worse. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Louise Vesth  
**Screenplay**  
Casper Christensen  
Frank Hvam

From the story by  
Casper Christensen,  
Frank Hvam and  
Mikkel Nørgaard

#### Director of

**Photography**  
Jacob Banke Olesen

#### Editors

Martin Schade

Morten Egholm

#### Production Designer

Rasmus Thjelleresen

#### Music

Kristian Eidnes

Andersen

#### Sound Recordist

Kasper Rasmussen

#### Costumes

Louise Hauberg

©Zentropa

Entertainments

10 ApS

#### Production

**Companies**

Zentropa

Entertainments

10 and Ja-Hatten

presents in co-

operation with TV2

Produced with

support from Det  
Danske Filminstitut in  
co-operation with TV2

#### Cast

**Frank Hvam**

Frank

**Casper Christensen**

Casper

**Marcus Jess**

Petersen

Bo

**Mia Lyhne**

Mia

**Iben Hjejle**

Iben

**Lars Hjortshøj**

Hjortshøj

**Tina Bilbo**

herself

**Mads Lisby**

Mads

**Anne Moen**

Katrine

**Niels Weyde**

Ole

**Elsebeth Steentoft**

Pykker

**Dolby Digital**

**In Colour**

**[1.85:1]**

**Subtitles**

#### Distributor

Arrow Film  
Distributors Ltd

Danish theatrical title

**Klown The Movie**

**Present-day Denmark. Fortyish Frank and his girlfriend Mia attend a wedding reception, where Frank learns to his alarm that Mia is pregnant. Back home he discovers that he and Mia are looking after her 12-year-old nephew Bo while the boy's parents are away. While Mia's out, burglars break in; Frank hides in terror. Mia tells him he'll be useless as a father. To prove otherwise, Frank decides to kidnap Bo and take him on the weekend canoeing trip that his friend Casper has planned as a sex odyssey. Casper is indignant but Frank pretends it's Mia's idea.**

**At a campsite, older boys mock Bo for having a small penis. Frank's attempt to defend him gets them thrown out. He and Casper quarrel and overturn the canoe. Ronja, a woman who lives nearby, takes them in. Casper has sex with her and encourages Frank to join in, but she takes offence and tells them to leave. At another campsite Bo overhears Frank and Casper joking about his penis; he tries to drown himself but is rescued by Ronja. Mia and Casper's wife Iben arrive to berate the two men. When she learns about Ronja, Iben breaks Casper's nose; Mia tells Frank that they're through and that she's getting an abortion. Abducting Bo from hospital, Frank and Casper embark on an Underberg-drinking marathon to collect the 288 bottle-caps Bo needs to win a model car. The Underberg showroom has no cars left, so Frank takes the display model at gunpoint. He's jailed for six months; when he gets out, Mia has forgiven him and has had the baby. At the christening party, evidence of Casper's sex odyssey comes to light.**

## Last Vegas

USA 2013  
Director: Jon Turteltaub  
Certificate 12A 105m 25s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

If affable OAP spree *Last Vegas* reminds one faintly of John Cassavetes's *Husbands* (1970) or Fred Schepisi's *Last Orders* (2001), it's surely not on the grounds of quality or emotional insight. What you recognise are the faint echoes of themes common to films about longstanding male friendship, issues of competition and masculinity. Director Jon Turteltaub sets his four friends wisecracking and arguing through a Vegas bachelor party rather than brawling and bawling Cassavetes-style: playboy Billy (Michael Douglas) and disgruntled widower Paddy (Robert De Niro in grouch-mode) feud over women past and present, while retiree Sam (Kevin Kline) seeks to use his indulgent wife's 'free pass' for infidelity, and stroke-survivor Archie (Morgan Freeman) tries to shuck off his family's infantilising care. They are all, nonetheless, seeking to break out or best one another in some way.

Admittedly there's no funeral here, though Billy's upcoming wedding to a much younger bride ("Thirty-two? I have haemorrhoids older than that") serves equally as a reminder of mortality. It's not just death but also the perceived emasculation of old age that dogs 'the Flatbush Four'. They share this with senior audiences who nowadays like to see themselves reflected as potent romantic leads (*Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, *Hope Springs*) or all-action players (*RED*, *The Expendables*, the upcoming *Grudge Match*). As ever in the male-friendship movie, a bender is the cure for all ills, and *Last Vegas* takes full advantage of its location's mythic party-town status to restore its heroes' masculine mojo. Pitched as *The Hangover* for the hip-replacement crowd, the film winks at every Vegas trope, from De Niro's mobster movies to the Rat Pack's 'one for all and all for kicks' capers.

Dan Fogelman's wry script milks the incongruity of ageing party-animals for laughs rather than age-inappropriate raunch comedy, much as he did with *Crazy Stupid Love's* reborn bachelor. He's best served by Kline's Sam, who provides nimble gags and double-takes while courteously negotiating with drag queens and hen parties during his frantic search for sex. However, for a film boasting five Academy Award-winners, *Last Vegas* doesn't go out of its way to stretch its lead actors, instead coasting happily on their camaraderie and pre-existing personas. Freeman's wise Archie and Douglas's flashily urbane Billy offer up no surprises, while De Niro's grumpy party-pooper boxing in his bathroom mirror *Raging Bull*-style prompts an unhelpful stab of viewer nostalgia for the actor's glory days. They all fare better than Mary Steenburgen's elegantly game lounge singer, though: she has the dubious honour of being a sixtyish trophy female (while looking barely over 40) and the only woman who comes into story focus in the blur of nightclub cuties and bikini-contest babes providing the foursome's eye candy. Her flirtation with Billy and his feud with Paddy are slick and witty rather than heartfelt – you miss the real sense of chances lost and bonds rendered that *Last Orders* made both subtle and sincere.

All of which makes *Last Vegas* seem hokey rather than wholehearted as the Flatbush Four pledge their final allegiance. "You guys are the



## Life's a Breeze

Ireland/Sweden 2013  
Director: Lance Daly



The nap pack: Douglas, Steenburgen

best thing that ever happened to me,” avers Billy fervently, while the others all nod incongruously, including the finally uxorious Sam and wife-worshipper Paddy. Even among the baby boomers, it seems, bromance is the new romance. 📺

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Laurence Mark <b>Written by</b> Amy Baer Dan Fogelman <b>Director of Photography</b> David Hennings <b>Editor</b> David Rennis <b>Production Designer</b> David J. Bomba <b>Music</b> Mark Mothersbaugh <b>Sound Mixer</b> David Kelson <b>Costume Designer</b> Dayna Pink	<b>CBS Films and Good Universe</b> present a Laurence Mark production A Jon Turteltaub film <b>Executive Producers</b> Nathan Kahane Jeremiah Samuels Lawrence Grey  <b>Cast</b> <b>Michael Douglas</b> Billy <b>Robert De Niro</b> Paddy <b>Morgan Freeman</b> Archie <b>Kevin Kline</b> Sam <b>Mary Steenburgen</b> Diana	<b>Jerry Ferrara</b> Dean <b>Romany Malco</b> Lonnie <b>Roger Bart</b> Maurice  <b>Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Universal Pictures International UK & Eire  <b>9,487 ft +8 frames</b>
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Las Vegas, present day. Seventy-year-old bachelor Billy takes his boyhood friends Archie, Sam and Paddy for a stag party before he marries his much younger girlfriend Lisa. Archie has recently had a minor stroke; Sam's wife has given him a 'free pass' to be unfaithful while in Vegas; and widower Paddy feuds with Billy for not attending his wife Sophie's funeral. Billy and Paddy are attracted to mature singer Diana. Winning a large sum of money at blackjack, Archie funds a nightclub spree and hotel penthouse for the four friends. They convince a young punk that they are mobsters, and persuade him to organise a lavish party. Sam turns down a fling with a young girl. Billy asks an outraged Diana to date Paddy. Paddy overhears Billy admitting that 50 years ago he told his true love Sophie to choose Paddy over him. They fight. Billy doesn't love Lisa but fears a lonely old age; Paddy tells her that he can't let Billy marry her. Billy and Paddy are reconciled. Billy starts dating Diana.

Three months later, Billy is engaged to Diana, Paddy is socialising, Archie is babysitting happily and Sam and his wife are having sex in the Vegas penthouse.

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Is it possible to make a crowd-pleasing Dublin comedy while Ireland's economic turmoil lurks in the background? Writer-director Lance Daly embarks on that quest with this strongly cast offering, whose unfolding farce remains credible enough to add some substance to the humour.

When Fionnula Flanagan's doughty Nan reacts with horror to the surprise makeover that her well-meaning family have inflicted on her dog-eared Dublin terrace, it's because she kept all her money in the old mattress they've just thrown away. In normal circumstances, we might think the old girl has a screw loose, but since she's one of the few not to have tied up their resources in Ireland's toxic boom-and-bust property market, she shows the logic of keeping your cash close at hand. Except now it's in a skip somewhere, or a landfill, or some illegal country tipping site, as the plot kicks in and the missing million euros are soon generating national headlines and threatening the cohesion of the family at the centre of it all.

Daly orchestrates the escalating mayhem without losing our sympathy for the old woman, who is increasingly ignored while all and sundry have their eyes on the monetary prize. The raucous comedy plays well enough but the film knows there's only so much mileage there, and the longer it goes on the more we realise that the madcap treasure hunt isn't really the point, merely an illustration of how greed diverts everyone from the more human priorities in their lives. The cast are certainly on message, with Flanagan's resolutely straight central performance refusing to turn Nan into a figure of fun, and comedian Pat Shortt (he of *Garage* fame, marvellous again) never glossing over the many inadequacies of layabout chancer Colm yet deftly showing the hurt and loneliness just beneath the surface bonhomie.

Whether it's fair to audiences to promise laughter and then give them something to ponder instead is a moot point. The film



Follow the money: Kelly Thornton

does rather run out of juice two thirds in, and stumbles over one last twist. Still, if Daly can't in the end square the circle, his use of widescreen and static camera gives the film a telling sense of composure when herky-jerky jollity might have been anticipated, and the affinity with youthful performers he showed in *Kisses* (2008), his previous, harder-edged drama of the Dublin streets, is evident again.

In the build-up to the money going missing, Daly takes care to focus on Kelly Thornton's Emma, an average 13-year-old not exactly overjoyed to have to run errands for her grandmother. Indeed, it's to her that he keeps returning throughout, measuring her growing maturity and topping everything with a closing grace note thoughtfully delivered by the capable young actress. The smiles may have faded by then, but by choosing to focus on a young person on a learning curve, Daly in the end draws something positive from the financial travails that have put the whole country through the wringer. 📺

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Maccara Kelleher Lance Daly <b>Written by</b> Lance Daly <b>Editor</b> Shimmy Marcus <b>Production Designer</b> Waldemar Kalinowski <b>Music Written by</b> Eugene Quinn Declan Quinn Lance Daly Kieran Lynch <b>Sound Mixer</b> Robert Flanagan <b>Costume Designer</b> Anna Agren	<b>AB, Film I Väst AB</b> Made with the support of The Swedish Film Institute, Setanta Sports and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Produced with the support of investment incentives for the Irish Film Industry provided by the Government of Ireland Supported by Eurimages A Fastnet Films production for Setanta Sports funded through the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Sound and Vision funding scheme Made with the support of The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Produced with the support of the MEDIA	<b>i2i Audiovisual</b> Programme of the European Union <b>Executive Producer</b> Jessica Ask  <b>Cast</b> <b>Fionnula Flanagan</b> Nan <b>Pat Shortt</b> Colm <b>Eva Birthistle</b> Margaret <b>Kelly Thornton</b> Emma <b>Geoff Minogue</b> Emma's dad <b>Philip Judge</b> Michael <b>Gerry McCann</b> Des <b>Lesley Conroy</b> Annie  <b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]  <b>Distributor</b> Wildcard Distribution
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Dublin, present day. Teenager Emma reluctantly runs errands for her grandmother, who lives nearby in an old terrace house with her layabout son Colm. While Emma takes Nan to the seaside for a day out, Colm and the rest of the family, including Emma's mother Margaret, give Nan's home a complete makeover. When Nan returns, she is shocked: she had €1 million stuffed in the mattress they've just thrown out. The family pursue Arthur, the man Colm paid to take everything away, and retrace his steps to an illegal tipping site in the countryside, but there's no sign of the mattress. After a fruitless search of landfill and recycling sites, Colm in desperation makes an appeal on local radio, and soon the story is all over the media. When an identical mattress is found with only a small amount of money inside, public opinion turns against the family, who blame Nan for misleading them. Only Emma retains faith in her, and the two continue to search, much to the dismay of Emma's mother. The family begin talking about residential care for Nan, but by chance Emma finds the mattress in an abandoned factory frequented by down-and-outs. Emma credits Colm with the find, to repair his relationship with Nan. The latter confesses that she exaggerated the amount of cash inside the mattress because she wanted a little attention.

## A Long Way from Home

United Kingdom/France/Thailand/USA 2013

Director: Virginia Gilbert

Certificate 12A 79m 47s



Summer madness: Natalie Dormer, James Fox

### Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

First-time feature filmmaker Virginia Gilbert adapts and directs her own short story about two couples, young and old, crossing paths in the South of France. *A Long Way from Home* aspires to interpret the much discussed discontent of the hitherto hardworking retired person by charting 72-year-old Joseph's ambiguous infatuation with a young woman holidaying in Nîmes, his new home.

Gilbert takes on the foremost creative roles here, but perhaps this wasn't the right project for her to show off her directing talents (though one couldn't say it was the wrong material). There's no ingenuity or enterprise besides a penchant for overexposure, made to seem pointed by recurrence.

Gilbert's choice of DP does little to compensate for her inexperience. Ed Rutherford's background

in commercials and fashion photography suited Joanna Hogg's *Archipelago* (2010) and *Exhibition* (2013). His camerawork in those films – austere and nakedly direct – pulled feathers from the understuffed seat cushion of Hogg's universe, with its ponderous atmosphere and below-the-surface rancour. But in *A Long Way from Home* it's surplus to docility and non-event. There are technical errors too. When Joseph watches the bedroom shutter opening and clacking shut repeatedly, we see no change in the reverse shot in the quality of light in the room. This says much about the film as a whole, which overlooks the linking of one scene to the next and makes no attempt to stretch and test the degree to which one character's behaviour might impact on another's.

There is a promising and troubling strangeness to the film at the start, in the common-or-garden peace and quiet of the elderly couple's routine and in James Fox's performance as Joseph. His facial expressions in the presence of the vernal Suzanne seem to signal a profundity of feeling perhaps too difficult or too near at hand for him to voice. Early on, there's hope that whatever it is will be quantified before the end. Well, it isn't: the film yields no justification for the dumb 'O' of his mouth and lingering gaze besides attraction, dumb attraction.

Part of the problem is that we aren't on Joseph's team. His wife Brenda, though marginalised, is a far more interesting character. The Oscar-winning Brenda Fricker crafts a shuffling, self-contented creature of habit, with more tragic appeal than Fox can match with the whole film at his service. (Her performance is so good – flawless, in fact – that it might almost make the film worth seeing.) But her goodness countermands the inclination of the narrative, by making Joseph's restless wandering seem weakness, a giving in to boredom. Unlike him, she has lost none of her vitality in maturity – it's just more deeply buried. When a cat is run over by a car in the presence of both couples and lies fatally injured and yowling, it is Brenda who – seeing that no one else will look to it – wrings the creature's neck for pity's sake. Brenda is true to herself, even if it means ordering the same steak night after night, beginning every day with a crossword and a reminder to Joseph to wear his hat in the heat.

Sadly, the film is a mess of crossed wires, and Fricker's real turn is lost in the sham. Ⓢ

## Mandela Long Walk to Freedom

Republic of South Africa/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Justin Chadwick, Certificate 12A 146m 28s

### Reviewed by Ashley Clark

By coincidence, on the day I watched Justin Chadwick's *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* I'd spent a good few minutes laughing myself silly at an online news story suggesting that long-departed Egyptian King Tut had spontaneously combusted in his tomb – apparently the result of a “bungled mummification”. That same phrase could, with sad accuracy, be used to describe what Chadwick's makeup team have done to Idris Elba in their unsuccessful attempts to get the actor to resemble the elderly South African leader in the later stages of this earnest biopic. Elba's makeup is distractingly awful and, despite his evident charisma and commitment to the part, he struggles to transcend the Madame Tussauds-like nature of his appearance.

Focusing on an actor's cosmetic appearance may seem like a cheap shot but it's appropriate for a film whose key problem is its inability to really dig beneath the surface and find what makes its subject tick. Mainstream biopics tend to fall into one of two camps: they'll either focus on a specific period in a subject's life (see, recently, *Lincoln* and *Diana*) or, like Lee Daniels's *The Butler*, will go the whole hog and attempt to tell the full story. This ambitious adaptation of the South African politician's 1994 autobiography falls squarely into the latter camp, and the end result displays an unsatisfying concertina effect whereby a life of almost unfathomably rich activity and complexity is squeezed and streamlined for ease of consumption. From the whistle-stop tour of Mandela's rural youth to the odd, abrupt ellipses in time – the action rudely jumps from Nelson's marriage to Winnie (Naomie Harris, whose nuanced performance is the best thing here) to the Sharpeville Massacre, for example – the film feels simultaneously overstretched and undernourished.

The haphazard pacing and editing wouldn't be so much of a problem if the subject felt relatable, but outside Mandela's politics (which are painted in the broadest, speech-ready strokes), the most we discover about the man is that he's a workaholic, and that he has something of an eye for the ladies. His early romantic exchanges with Winnie are stilted, soft-focus encounters rooted in a practical need for exposition and beat-by-beat storytelling rather than anything like genuine feeling. As such, the pair's initial enforced separation carries far less dramatic weight than it should. That their eventual parting – divided sharply by ideology and practice – comes and goes with a shrug rather than deep emotional catharsis is one of the film's greatest disappointments. Contrast Chadwick's film with *The Butler*, which tempers its adherence to traditional biopic trappings with a pungent sense of humour and a genuine interest in its characters and the social spaces they inhabit. Daniels is investigating lives, Chadwick seems to be ticking boxes.

Though the film doesn't stint on depicting virulent prejudice in South Africa – a key early scene depicting the murder of a friend of Mandela's is all the more effective for its clinical nature, as are the brutal sequences in Robben Island prison – its attempts at scene-setting are often clunky in the extreme; on numerous occasions, Chadwick resorts to the hoary old

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Junyoung Jang  
Guillaume Benski

**Written by**  
Virginia Gilbert

Based on her  
short story

**Director of  
Photography**  
Ed Rutherford

**Editor**  
Thomas Goldser

**Production  
Designer**  
Thomas Laporte

**Sound Designer**  
Steve Bond

**Costume Designer**  
Mimi Milburn-Foster

©A Long Way  
Film Ltd/Superbe  
Films SARL  
**Production  
Companies**

February Films  
& Superbe  
Films present  
in association  
with Triton Films,  
Kratos, 24/7 Films,  
VisVires Capital

**Executive  
Producers**  
James Jirayuth  
Sangtaweep  
J.B. Virawat  
Dangsubtrau  
Corrado Jay Boccia  
Virginia Gilbert  
Abner Pastoll  
Mauro Gabrielle  
François Robey  
Luc Giraud

**Cast**  
James Fox  
Joseph

**Natalie Dormer**  
Suzanne  
**Paul Nicholls**  
Mark  
**Brenda Fricker**  
Brenda  
**Didier Bourguignon**  
Gérard  
**Jacques Hansen**  
Robert  
**Julien Masdoua**  
doctor  
**Isalinde Giovangigli**  
Valérie

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

7,180 ft +8 frames

Nîmes, present day. Ex-pat couple Joseph and Brenda are enjoying a restful retirement. At their favourite restaurant they meet young holidaymakers Mark and Suzanne. Joseph is immediately taken with Suzanne, and shares his tourist tips with the couple. The following day he looks for them at the recommended landmark. When a cat is fatally injured by a passing car, Brenda breaks its neck. Joseph drives Mark to visit a friend's vineyard, and strolls with Suzanne. Lying to Brenda about his whereabouts, he tails the young couple to Arles but can't find them. Over a farewell dinner, Suzanne tells Joseph that Mark has proposed, but she is undecided. Next morning, Brenda takes breakfast to a muted Joseph, who is indisposed.



## Nebraska

USA 2013

Director: Alexander Payne

Certificate 15 114m 38s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

See feature  
on page 46

It's been over a decade since Omaha-born Alexander Payne last traversed, cinematically at least, his home state. Jack Nicholson's retired widower took to a Winnebago

Adventurer in 2002's *About Schmidt*, searching for meaning in a life no longer sustained by a wife and an insurance job. Now 77-year-old Bruce Dern plays befuddled alcoholic wastrel Woody Grant, who hits the road with a 'prize certificate', aiming to collect the \$1 million he believes he's due from a junk-mail marketing office in Lincoln. Driving him is his exasperated fortyish son (SNL performer Will Forte in more serious mode), well aware that his dad has fallen for a scam but unable to persuade him otherwise.

It's a scenario rich with both absurdly comic and ruminatively elegiac elements, but the black-and-white camerawork foregrounds the sadness, making everything look more serious and older. Black-and-white is a defiantly uncommercial choice, which (as with Peter Bogdanovich's *The Last Picture Show*) lends a sense of dignity, perhaps even iconic stature, to a scuffed, everyday corner of Middle America, echoing the Depression-era images of Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. The 21st century's own economic downturn has taken its toll here too, for the ravaged main streets and struggling communities Payne captures this time around stand in marked contrast to the quirky tourist byways he picked up on when he passed this way with Schmidt.

The tone has shifted in the meantime as well, dialling down the somewhat sardonic amusement at the foibles of provincialism that has been evident to a greater or less extent in Payne's filmography to date, instead foregrounding a sense of individuals desperately struggling for some sense of worth as their lives slip away from their grasp. Dern, great icon of American cinema's pre-*Star Wars* golden era that he is, turns in a performance that's affecting for its sheer lack of affectation. He has played kooky and wiggled-out so often that he's even dubbed his sundry tics and caprices 'Dernsies', yet there's none of that here. Instead he disappears into the part in a way Nicholson never did with Schmidt. It's exactly what's required, since Woody Grant is pretty much lost in an internal fog, operating day by day on a level of maddening obtuseness that affords only fleeting glimpses of the man he used to be. The result is certainly not the most ingratiating of Payne's movies but it's hard not to be impressed by the way it holds its nerve, refusing to give Woody any grandstanding *cri de coeur* speeches, never going soft on us, but shaping the contours of the road-trip narrative so that the son's growing realisation and acceptance of his father's largely wasted life and irreversible decline are seen as the self-knowledge he himself needs to deal with his fortysomething malaise.

For a filmmaker who's been acclaimed for achieving a novelistic sense of psychological richness, often adapting literary sources and using voiceover to spell out the characters' feelings, this very sparseness feels like a new chapter; here Payne is as willing to let looks and glances carry the emotions as he was in that lovely



Arrested development: Idris Elba

trick of mocked-up radio reports to set a top-line agenda. The film's general avoidance of a wider political context (ie anything not based around Mandela – there is, for instance, no reference at all to Steve Biko) leaves it looking overly simplistic. One montage featuring Gil Scott-Heron's 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised' is a particularly egregious example, collapsing the complexity of the song's message into a glib highlight reel that also, inexplicably, includes footage of the real Mandela, jarring us out of the world the film is trying to create. The shadowy political intrigue of the late 80s and early 90s, which saw Mandela locked in negotiations with the De Klerk administration, is complex enough to warrant its own film (it

got one in the 2009 TV movie *Endgame*) but feels thin and hurried here. However, there is a sly, nicely judged turn from a bewigged Deon Lotz (so terrifying in Oliver Hermanus's *Beauty*) as canny political adviser Kobie Coetzee.

In years to come, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* – an undeniably earnest and respectful piece of work – may find its natural home in school classrooms, where its digestible, compartmentalised approach will lend itself to being broken up into lesson-length pieces. But ultimately it feels more like a big-budget animated Wikipedia page than gripping cinema. When it finishes, one has a fair enough idea of what Mandela has done, but little sense of who he is. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Anant Singh  
**Producer for**  
**Origin Pictures**  
David M. Thompson  
**Screenplay**  
William Nicholson  
Based on  
Nelson Mandela's  
autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Lol Crawley  
**Editor**  
Rick Russell

#### Production Designer

Johnny Breedt  
**Music**  
Alex Heffes  
**Sound Mixer**  
Nico Louw  
**Costume Designer**  
Dian Cilliers  
Ruy Filipe

©Long Walk to Freedom (Pty) Ltd  
**Production Companies**  
An Ant Singh presentation

A Justin Chadwick film in association with Distant Horizon, Origin Pictures, Pathé, Long Walk to Freedom (Pty) Ltd, Industrial Development Corporation of South Africa Limited and National Empowerment Fund  
A Videovision Entertainment production  
Produced with the assistance of the

Department of Trade and Industry South Africa  
**Executive Producers**  
Cameron McCracken  
François Ivernel  
Geoffrey Qhena  
Basil Ford  
Sudhir Praggjee  
Sanjeev Singh  
Philisiwe Mthethwa  
Harvey Weinstein  
**Film Extracts**  
*The Last Time I Saw Paris* (1954)

#### Cast

Idris Elba  
Nelson Mandela  
Naomie Harris  
Winnie Madikizela  
Tony Kgoroge  
Walter Sisulu  
Riaad Moosa  
Ahmed Kathrada  
Jamie Bartlett  
James Gregory  
Lindiwe Matshikiza  
Zinzi Mandela at 28–32 years old  
Terry Pheto

Evelyn Mase  
Deon Lotz  
Kobie Coetzee

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

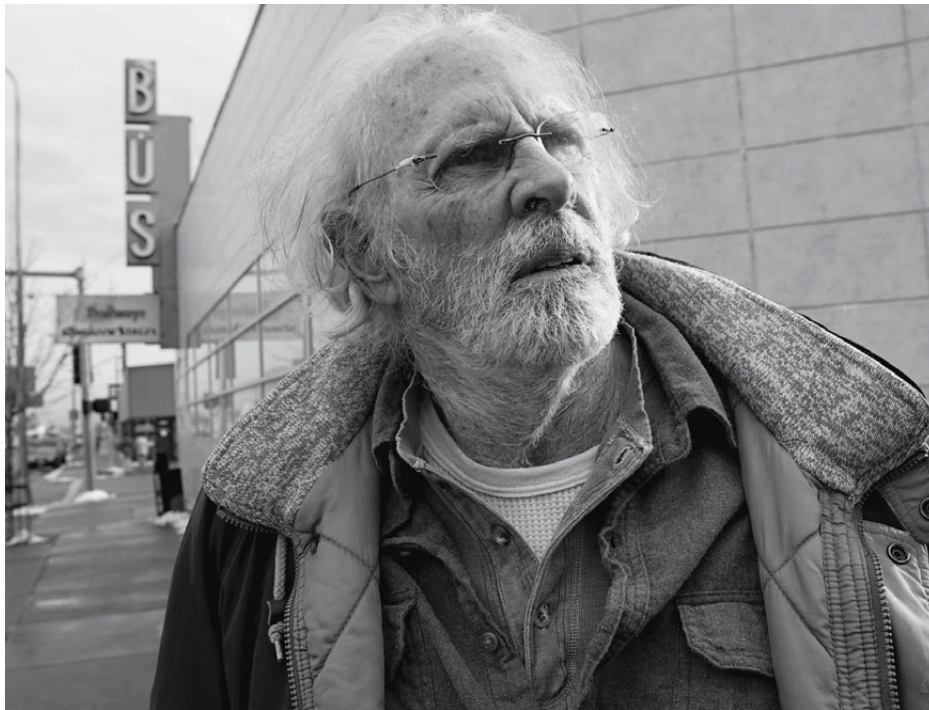
**Distributor**  
Pathé Productions

13.182ft +0 frames

#### An adaptation of Nelson Mandela's autobiography 'Long Walk to Freedom'

Johannesburg, 1942. Mandela, who is working as a lawyer, joins the African National Congress (ANC) after a friend is killed by police. In 1944 he marries Evelyn and becomes increasingly politically active. In the 1948 general election (in which only whites are permitted to vote), the Afrikaner-dominated Herenigde Nasionale Party takes power, codifying racial segregation according to apartheid legislation. Mandela, now organising direct-action resistance with ANC colleagues, divorces Evelyn and soon meets and marries social worker Winnie. In 1960, following the Sharpeville Massacre, Mandela publicly burns his passport in protest. Along with ANC colleagues, Mandela goes underground and engages in a campaign of resistance, bombing military installations, power

plants, telephone lines and transport links. In 1962 he is captured by police and detained at a Pretoria prison. In 1964 he is sentenced to life imprisonment and sent to Robben Island prison. While he is in prison, Winnie's political activity increases and she too is arrested, then released in 1970. In 1982, Mandela is transferred to Pollsmoor Prison along with ANC colleagues, but is soon transferred again to the more comfortable Victor Verster prison, where he enters into negotiations with government figures over how to stem the tide of violence sweeping the country. In 1990 Mandela is released from prison. Now leader of the ANC, and in close contact with President F.W. de Klerk, he demands a unitary system governed by majority rule. He is met with opposition but a general election is arranged for 1994. Mandela becomes head of a Government of National Unity, dominated by the ANC.



Keep on trucking: Bruce Dern

← closing family sofa scene in *The Descendants* (2011). Forte's adeptly attuned contribution works beautifully in the circumstances, with many micro-shades of frustration, suppressed anger, disappointment and deep familial affection readable in his handdog expression. (Perhaps the whole approach can be traced back to the fact that this particular project differs from its predecessors in coming from Bob Nelson's original screenplay rather than the slightly leftfield novels Payne and his erstwhile writing partner Jim Taylor have previously chosen to adapt.)

As with all Payne's films, there's a marvellously lived-in feeling to the relationships in the story, particularly evident as more of Woody's past comes

to light in an enforced stay in the town where he grew up and where he has extended family he sees little of. The poised framing of the travelling sequences and local scene-setting, which suggest that whole swathes of this Middle American heartland are in the midst of a deterioration as sad and inevitable as Woody's, come across as slightly self-conscious in context, though definitely less jarring than the doltish cousins who are the one misjudged concession to knockabout humour. These are minor cavils, however. Overall, this intimate, insightful character study is affectingly true to itself, a heartening sign that a major American filmmaker is on confident form as he develops and deepens his craft. 8

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Albert Berger  
Ron Yerxa  
**Written by**  
Bob Nelson  
**Director of Photography**  
Phedon Papamichael  
**Edited by**  
Kevin Tent  
**Production Designer**  
Dennis Washington  
**Music**  
Mark Orton

**Sound Mixer**  
José Antonio García  
**Costume Designer**  
Wendy Chuck  
  
©Paramount Vantage  
**Production Companies**  
Paramount  
Vantage presents  
in association  
with FilmNation  
Entertainment,  
Blue Lake Media

Fund, Echo Lake  
Entertainment a Bona  
Fide production  
**Executive Producers**  
Doug Mankoff  
Neil Tabatznik  
George Parra  
Julie M. Thompson

**Cast**  
**Bruce Dern**  
Woody Grant  
**Will Forte**

David Grant  
**June Squibb**  
Kate Grant  
**Stacy Keach**  
Ed Pegram  
**Bob Odenkirk**  
Ross Grant  
**Mary Louise Wilson**  
Aunt Martha  
**Rance Howard**  
Uncle Ray  
**Tim Driscoll**  
Bart  
**Devin Ratray**

Cole  
**Angela McEwan**  
Peg Nagy  
**Glendora Stitt**  
Aunt Betty  
**Elizabeth Moore**  
Aunt Flo  
  
**Dolby Digital/  
Datasat**  
**In Black and White**  
[2.35:1]  
  
**Distributor**

Paramount  
Pictures UK  
  
**10,317 ft +0 frames**

Billings, Montana, present day. Confused septuagenarian Woody Grant keeps trying to walk to Lincoln, Nebraska, to collect the \$1 million he's convinced he's won in a marketing company sweepstakes. His fortysomething son David, a salesman, knows the prize notification is phoney but agrees to drive Woody to Lincoln, seeing it as a chance to spend some time with his father. On the way, a drunken Woody falls in their motel room, necessitating hospital treatment, so they stay with family in Hawthorne over the weekend. Some of Woody's relatives are delighted by his news, while others are keen to grab a slice of the money. As they revisit former haunts and meet old

friends, David learns more about Woody's traumatic Korean War experience and begins to understand the frustrations behind his father's lifetime of drinking; he realises that all the old man has left is the hope of buying a new truck (even though he's banned from driving). When Woody's former business partner Ed Pegram gets hold of the 'prize certificate', his scorn turns to pity when he realises the old man believes in the scam. The strain causes Woody to collapse. After a second hospital stay, he and David visit the lottery company to be told they haven't won. David pays for a new truck out of his own money, giving Woody one last moment of triumph as he drives down Hawthorne's main street.

## One Chance

Director: David Frankel  
Certificate 12A 103m 9s

### Reviewed by Wally Hammond

A genuine dip in the romantic-comedy career of David Frankel, the American director of *Hope Springs* (2012), this is an ineptly episodic 'based on a true story' tale of opera singer Paul Potts, who rose from Welsh rags to international celebrity via the *Britain's Got Talent* TV show. (Potts is a Bristolian, but his adopted Welshness is thoroughly milked in the uninspired script by Justin *The Bucket List* Zackham.)

Strange to say, the film is slain not by cliché – though Trystan Gravelle's laughable bully Matthew is a villain of Keystone Cops pedigree – but by stunning levels of timidity and (for a film about aspiration) a crippling lack of ambition. You can see it in James Corden's toned-down and inhibited portrayal of Potts, and in the awkwardness and lack of engagement of such thespian stalwarts as Colm Meaney and Julie Walters (mum and dad) and Mackenzie Crook. Cinematographer Florian Ballhaus's shots of Port Talbot remind one of *Look at Life* documentaries, and most tourists have taken better shots of Venice, where Paul goes to meet his hero Pavarotti, on their iPhones.

The final shots are matched from the original *Britain's Got Talent* show, and the culminating sense of excitement they supply must be tempered by the repeated sight of the self-promoting mugs of judges Simon Cowell, Piers Morgan and Amanda Holden. 8

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Mike Menchel  
Simon Cowell  
Brad Weston  
Kris Thykier

**Written by**  
Justin Zackham  
**Director of Photography**  
Florian Ballhaus

**Edited by**  
Wendy Greene  
Bricmont  
**Production Designer**  
Martin Childs

**Music**  
Theodore Shapiro  
**Sound Mixer**  
Ian Voigt  
**Costume Designer**  
Colleen Kelsall

**Production Companies**  
The Weinstein  
Company presents  
a Relevant  
Entertainment/  
Weston Pictures

production  
A film by David  
Frankel  
**Executive Producers**  
Bob Weinstein  
Harvey Weinstein  
Steve Whitney

**Cast**  
**James Corden**  
Paul Potts  
**Alexandra Roach**  
Julie-Anne 'Julz'  
Cooper  
**Mackenzie Crook**  
Braddon Evans  
**Colm Meaney**  
Roland Potts  
**Julie Walters**  
Yvonne Potts  
**Jemima Rooper**  
Hydrangea  
**Valeria Bilello**  
Alessandra

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Entertainment Film  
Distributors Ltd  
  
**9,283 ft +8 frames**

Port Talbot, circa 1980. Nine-year-old Paul Potts attends church singing practice. Classmate Matthew smashes his teeth, part of a continuing bullying process at school. A decade later, Paul is working at Carphone Warehouse. He meets shop worker Jules through online dating. He travels to Venice and meets his hero Luciano Pavarotti, who is discouraging about his singing. Paul and Jules marry and on their wedding night Paul is offered a lead role with Bath Opera Society. He abandons his singing ambitions after a road accident but in 2007 enters and wins 'Britain's Got Talent'. He buys a new house and has his teeth fixed.



## The Patience Stone

France/Germany/United Kingdom/Afghanistan 2012  
Director: Atiq Rahimi

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

War is male folly nobly suffered by women, and masculinity the source of most of the world's other noxiousness to boot, in Atiq Rahimi's adaptation of his own 2008 novel, co-scripted with the veteran screenwriter and frequent Buñuel collaborator Jean-Claude Carrière. Despite carefully considered cinematography, the piece remains distinctly more literary than cinematic in its tone, partly because its structure consists of a virtual monologue by actress Golshifteh Farahani, and partly because a tendency to over-explain itself can render its visual elements somewhat superfluous.

Farahani plays a young woman whose older husband, a former Mujahideen fighter, is unconscious from a bullet wound, and seemingly hovering between life and death under her uncertain care, while fighting continues to rage outside. Speaking out loud as she tends to him comes to function as a sort of confessional for her, and she begins to reveal to him her sexual history and darkest family secrets, safe – for a while at least – in the knowledge that he cannot hear her. The film's title refers to a fable she is told regarding a stone that absorbs secrets and then absolves the speaker of their burden by shattering. Here as elsewhere in the film, Rahimi's storytelling betrays a certain anxiety: lest we miss the clear metaphorical association between the listening stone and the woman's unconscious husband, he draws it to our notice again and again. (The title might have been enough.) Similarly, the fighting quails kept by the woman's father are insistently presented as symbols of both male genitalia and pointless male violence.

The film's fierce contempt for men in general – its only remotely positive male character is a virginal, incompetent rapist, disempowered



Golshifteh Farahani, Hamidreza Javdan

by a combination of sexual inexperience and a stutter – may rankle with some, particularly since it is written and directed by males and could thus be regarded as a little ersatz in its rage. Still, its uncompromising exploration of the effects on a young woman's self-esteem and sexuality of living in a society preoccupied with the control and repression of her gender is unpredictable, intriguing and ultimately even a little shocking. Farahani, meanwhile, has some clumsy writing to contend with, not least her character's habit of repetitively pondering aloud ("Why am I telling you all of this?" "Why am I talking so much?") which pushes the film's self-conscious, anti-naturalistic set-up unnecessarily to the fore, as well as virtually unbroken screen time. She is, however, as fans of Asghar Farhadi's *About Elly* (2009) know, possessed of both subtle gifts and one of current cinema's most astonishing faces, and can thus bear the weight of what is almost a one-woman show with more grace than many actresses might. Ⓜ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Michael Gentile  
**Screenplay**  
Jean-Claude Carrière  
Atiq Rahimi  
Based on the novel  
*Syngué Sabour, pierre de patience*  
by Atiq Rahimi  
**Director of Photography**  
Thierry Arbogast  
**Editor**  
Hervé de Luze  
**Art Director**  
Erwin Prib  
**Music**  
Max Richter  
**Sound**  
Dana Farzanehpour  
Noemi Hampel  
Lars Ginzler  
**Costume Designer**  
Malak Djaham Khazal

Pictures, Studio 37,  
Arte France Cinéma,  
Jahan-e-Honar  
Productions  
co-production  
With the participation  
of Ministère de la  
Culture et de la  
Communication in  
partnership with  
Centre National du  
Cinéma et de l'Image  
Animée and Film-  
förderungsanstalt,  
Medienboard Berlin-  
Brandenburg, ARTE  
France, Fonds Sud  
Cinéma, Ministère des  
Affaires Étrangères et  
Européennes France  
With the support of  
MEDIA Programme of  
the European Union  
and i2i Audiovisual  
**Executive Producer**  
Philippe Gautier

**Mohamed Maghraoui**  
mullah  
**Malak Djaham Khazal**  
neighbour  
**Faiz Fazli**  
gunman

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Axiom Films Limited

French theatrical title  
*Syngué Sabour, pierre de patience*  
Onscreen English  
subtitle  
*Syngué Sabour, The Patience Stone*

**Cast**  
**Golshifteh Farahani**  
woman  
**Hamidreza Javdan**  
man  
**Hassina Burgan**  
aunt  
**Massi Mrowat**  
young soldier

©The Film, Razor  
Film, Studio 37,  
Corniche Pictures,  
Arte France Cinéma,  
Jahan-e-Honar  
Productions  
**Production Companies**  
Michael Gentile, Hani  
Farsi and Studio 37  
present a The Film,  
Razor Film, Corniche

Afghanistan, the present or recent past. In a city under rocket fire, a young mother is trapped in her home caring for her husband, a Mujahideen fighter who is comatose following a bullet wound to the neck. As she tends his prone body she talks to him, initially about the departure of their friends from the city, but then with increasing frankness about her life and their relationship. When her windows are shattered by explosions, she takes refuge in the cellar, leaving the unconscious man alone; renegade soldiers break in, steal his watch and wedding ring, and kill her neighbours. She visits her aunt, a prostitute, who tells her stories, including that of the 'Patience Stone', to which secrets can be told until it shatters. Back at her house, the young woman hides her husband in a cupboard. Another soldier intrudes; she tells him that she is a widow who supports herself through prostitution, and he spits at her. He is soon followed by a stuttering young soldier who offers her money for sex; when she denies that she is a whore, he rapes her. She uses the money he leaves to buy medicine and food. He returns and they have sex, with her guiding him to give her pleasure. Afterwards she feels guilty and prays. The soldier comes back and shows her scars from abuses perpetrated by his commander, the man who spat at her. When the soldier leaves, she continues to talk to her husband, telling him that their daughters are not his: he is sterile and she was impregnated by a stranger procured by her aunt's pimp. Her husband wakes as she is speaking. He tries to choke her and she stabs him to death with his dagger. The young soldier turns up and witnesses the scene. She smiles at him.

## Powder Room

United Kingdom 2013  
Director: MJ Delaney  
Certificate 15 86m 18s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

"Clubbing lasts for five hours, Facebook lasts forever," insists wily good-time girl Chanel, checking her makeup with a smartphone snap. It's what passes for philosophy in this slight but chirpy comedy, which undertakes to lift the lid on what happens in the ladies' loo. Nothing shocking or life-changing, according to the episodic catalogue of embarrassments that trip up Sheridan Smith's wry, aspirational heroine Sam, desperate to join the picture-perfect life of an old school friend.

Bruited about as 'the British *Bridesmaids*', *Powder Room* suffers from being late to the 'girls behaving badly' party, now that *Bachelorette*, *Bad Teacher* and *The To Do List* have colonised raunch comedy. Comparisons with *Bridesmaids* do the film few favours, in fact, since despite a similar central premise (a life-swiped heroine repeatedly shames herself in front of her friends), it's significantly less well structured or funny. Galloping along cheerfully, incorporating stray comic episodes with strangers (a woman scared of phone sex, a girl mistakenly in fancy dress), it's much closer in humour, if not in looks, to BBC3 comedies like *Two Pints of Lager and a Packet of Crisps*, Smith's long-time TV berth.

First-time director MJ Delaney, previously best known for the hit YouTube spoof *Newport (Ymerodraeth State of Mind)*, brings nicely choppy visuals and a defiantly British feel to the cosmetic-waving, drink-stealing, snogging claustrophobia of a suburban club night. But the script, adapted from screenwriter Rachel Hirons's fringe play *When Women Wee*, which was basically a set of linked sketches, struggles to find its feet. Neither a raunch comedy nor a kids-are-all-right clubbing drama, it becomes simply the film version of an elongated bad-night-out anecdote. 'Realness', which it has in spades, isn't enough to hold it up. Some whip-fast farce plotting or well-built set pieces involving Sam would have helped. Instead we get an MDMA 'trip' undertaken by minor characters and a drunken attempt at phone sex by a marginal one, which stall rather than build up the story.

Sharp-eyed about the harm women do to one another, in a stream of neat barbs about slut-shaming, female loyalty and the omnipresent pressure of Facebook life-porn, it's a likeable movie rather than a well-honed one. There are occasional felicities, like the sweet strand following a squealing underage girl snubbing her friend to hover all night by a disinterested male, introducing Nicole Holofcener themes via *Hollyoaks* style. Charm is chiefly the preserve of Smith, however, her goodhearted Sam rubbed raw by life but quick and funny enough to carry the viewer along with her. It's a one-woman job, since the other characters are back-of-the-envelope rich bitches or carousing ladettes, where only Jaime Winstone's brassy man-eater Chanel, dedicated to amassing free drinks and fast sex, really registers.

*Powder Room* promises to be eye-opening but winds up predictably tame, banging the drum for female solidarity in choosing old, albeit rowdy, friends over snobby role models. It may pass the Bechdel test with flying colours (even off screen – director, writer and a producer are female) and commendably doesn't



Toilet humour: Sheridan Smith

introduce a 'nice' man as a reward for the beleaguered Sam. Yet its combination of bitchiness and girls-come-first message wasn't new back when *Sex and the City* filched it from *The Women*. We're still waiting on the film that encourages women to 'Riot Not Diet', as a favourite cubicle graffito suggests. ☹

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Damian Jones  
James Cotton  
Nichola Martin

**Written by**  
Rachel Hirons  
Based upon the stage play *When Women Wee* by Rachel Hirons, Stef O'Driscoll, Natasha Sparkes, Stephanie Jay, Emily Wallis, Amirah Garba, Amy Revelle, Jennifer Davies

**Director of Photography**  
John Lee

**Editor**  
Ben Jordan

**Production Designer**  
Soraya Gilanni

**Music**  
Fake Club

**Production Sound Mixer**  
Jake Whitelee

**Costume Designer**  
PC Williams

**@DJ Films (www) Ltd**  
**Production Companies**  
DJ Films presents in association with Pinewood Fims a DJ Films production  
**Executive Producers**  
Steve Norris  
Ivan Dunleavy

**Cast**  
Sheridan Smith  
Sam  
Jaime Winstone  
Chanel

**Kate Nash**  
Michelle  
**Oona Chaplin**  
Jess  
**Riann Steele**  
Paige  
**Sarah Hoare**  
Saskia

**Johnnie Fiori**  
toilet attendant  
**Micah Balfour**  
James  
**Alex Warren**  
Sean  
**Zara White**  
Stacey  
**Alice Sanders**  
Mel  
**Antonia Bernath**  
Kim

**In Colour**

**Distributor**  
Vertigo Films

7,767 ft +0 frames

UK, present day. Dissatisfied waitress Sam goes clubbing with rich former school friend Michelle and her Parisian friend Jess. After hiding unsuccessfully from three of her old friends in the ladies' lavatories, she berates one of them, Chanel, for her promiscuity. Sam lies to Michelle and Jess, saying that she is a lawyer and engaged to her boyfriend Sean. Her other old friends Paige and Saskia take MDMA and have a stoned quasi-sexual encounter in a cubicle. Sam rescues a bewildered Paige. Jess and Michelle find Sean kissing another woman. Sean reveals that he and Sam have been apart for a year. Sam tells her old friends that she lied because she envied the rich girls' lives and wanted to join them. Sam instructs an inhibited wife in how to perform phone sex, comforts Paige and is punched by a girl for stealing her drink. It transpires that Michelle is a secret cocaine addict. Jess has a bitter phone fight with her husband, overhears by everyone in the loo. Sam realises who her real friends are, starts dancing alone on the club stage and is joined by Chanel, Paige and Saskia. The lavatory attendant is revealed to be a fine singer, and the club band join in with her final song.

## The Railway Man

Australia/United Kingdom/France/Switzerland 2013  
Director: Jonathan Teplitzky



Bridging the gulf: Colin Firth

## Reviewed by Kate Stables

Eric Lomax, a survivor of World War II's notorious Kanchanaburi POW camp, held forthright views about the 1957 film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, which he accused of "baby lotioning the harsh reality of the Death Railway by its heavily sanitised and cosmetic representation on screen". By comparison, this handsome, conventional and solidly respectful adaptation of his memoir of his own wartime ordeal and its long-delayed reckoning is frank about the brutal treatment he received at the hands of the Japanese, and equally unblinking about its lasting psychological damage. Yet perhaps out of an anxiety to honour Lomax's memory correctly, *The Railway Man* eschews really hard-hitting or visceral recreations of his torture and enduring anguish in favour of an old-fashioned classical shooting style that

lends the whole enterprise a slightly distanced air.

Unlike the gritty, unbridled portrayals of combat-related PTSD in films such as *Jarhead* (2005), *Home of the Brave* (2005) or *The Hurt Locker* (2008), here trauma casts decades of crippling shadow over everyday life, hidden under English self-restraint. After 40 years, Lomax's one-time interrogator Nagase still stalks his dreams, and radio static or everyday arguments plummet him helplessly back into his remembered ordeals. The film's cool tone aids director Jonathan Teplitzky in filtering these psychic eruptions into the film's love story without overkill, and lets him gradually unwrap the layers of Lomax's ordeal. Despite the copious Death Railway flashbacks, this isn't a war movie but one about making peace with the past.

It also makes an interesting delayed and contrasting coda to that 1950s run of British

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Andy Paterson  
Chris Brown  
Bill Curbisley

**Screenplay**  
Frank Cottrell Boyce  
Andy Paterson

**Based on the book by**  
Eric Lomax

**Director of Photography**  
Garry Phillips

**Film Editor**  
Martin Connor

**Production Designer**  
Steven Jones-Evans

**Original Music**  
Composed by  
David Hirschfelder

**Sound Supervisor**

**Andrew Plain**  
**Costume Designer**  
Lizzy Gardiner

**@Railway Man Pty Ltd, Railway Man Ltd, Railway Man Teplitzky film**  
Developed in association with Film4, InterMedia Films

**Production Companies**  
Screen Australia

**in association with**  
Silver Reel, Screen Queensland, Creative Scotland, Screen NSW

**Lionsgate UK present**  
an Andy Paterson, Pictures in Paradise,

**Trinifold production**  
in association with Davis Films and Latitude Media

**A Jonathan Teplitzky film**  
Developed in association with Film4, InterMedia Films

**Financed in association with**  
Fulcrum Media

**Finance, Screen NSW**  
Supported by the National Lottery through Creative Scotland

**Produced in association**

**with DeLuxe**  
Co-financed, developed and produced with assistance from Screen Queensland

**Principal Investor:**  
Screen Australia

**Executive Producers**  
Claudia Bluemhuber

**Ian Hutchinson**  
Zygi Kamasa

**Nick Manzi**  
Daria Jovicic

**Anand Tucker**

**Cast**  
Colin Firth  
Eric Lomax

**Nicole Kidman**  
Patti Lomax  
**Jeremy Irvine**  
young Eric Lomax

**Stellan Skarsgård**  
Finlay  
**Sam Reid**  
young Finlay

**Tanroh Ishida**  
young Nagase

**Hiroyuki Sanada**  
Nagase

**Michael MacKenzie**  
Sutton

**Jeffrey Daunt**  
Burton

**Bryan Proberts**  
Major York

**Tom Stokes**  
Within

**Tom Hobbs**  
Thorby  
**Akos Armont**  
Jackson

**Dolby Digital**  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

Scotland, 1983. Retired lecturer Eric Lomax meets and marries Patti. He is still traumatised by his experiences as a prisoner working on the Death Railway in Thailand during WWII, and his erratic behaviour threatens their marriage. (A flashback shows Lomax suffering a savage beating after he is discovered building a forbidden radio at Kanchanaburi POW camp.) Fellow veteran Finlay tells Patti of the horrors they suffered during the war, and proposes that Lomax confront his torturer Nagase in Thailand. Lomax refuses. Finlay hangs himself. Lomax travels to Thailand and finds Nagase alone in the POW camp, which is now a Death Railway museum. We flash back to the young Lomax being viciously interrogated

by Nagase, who is convinced that he is transmitting to the Chinese. Lomax confronts the older Nagase about his wartime behaviour and threatens him with a knife. Nagase, protesting that he has sought redemption, prepares to die. Lomax has flashbacks to being waterboarded by Nagase. Nagase once despised the British for surrendering but now repents. Lomax releases him and throws his knife in the river.

A year later Lomax brings Patti to Thailand. At the Hellfire Pass memorial, Nagase apologises profoundly and Lomax gives him a letter offering total forgiveness. The epilogue reveals their close friendship until Nagase's death in 2011.



## Rough Cut

United Kingdom 2013  
Director: Jamie Shovlin

### Reviewed by Gilda Williams

On YouTube you can view the trailer for *Hiker Meat*, a 70s-style teenage slasher flick for which *Rough Cut* is the 'making of' documentary. The twist is that *Hiker Meat* does not exist: *Rough Cut* is a solipsistic artist's project impossibly gathering 'behind the scenes' production shots and cast-and-crew interviews for a film that was never made.

Jamie Shovlin is evidently continuing the long tradition of contemporary artists toying with the cultural paraphernalia surrounding the movie industry, evidenced since at least Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* in the 1970s. More recently we have seen Tacita Dean's *Foley Artist* (1996), a sound installation about that unseen but noisy profession; Francesco Vezzoli's uproariously decadent 'trailer' for an alleged film entitled *Gore Vidal's Caligula* (2005); and Omer Fast's multi-screened *Take a Deep Breath* (2008), a film about a film about an actual historic event. The longest among those three precedents is 27 minutes; *Rough Cut* is a full-length 86-minute variation. Very early on it starts to feel like a feature-length one-liner, riffing on a single conceit: a film documenting its own making (a feat far more successfully attempted, moreover, by mainstream cinema back in 2002, with Charlie Kaufman's screenplay for *Adaptation*).

Occasionally we are treated to some mild cleverness about the banality of filmmaking, such as when bland images of a young girl peering into the mid-distance or close-ups of busy worker ants, spliced together and enhanced with creepy music and harsh purplish light, turn instantly ominous and sinister. A moment of hilarity is offered by a boring shot of machinery being loaded on to a



Navel gaze: *Rough Cut*

truck, accompanied by incongruously spooky *Suspiria*-esque music. But every digital-age amateur home filmmaker, equipped with even an outdated version of iMovie, already knows well the manipulative effects of film editing. At best *Rough Cut*'s compilation of common 1970s horror-film tropes – the haunted campsite, the lonely hitchhiker – and word-for-word, shot-by-shot reconstructions of genre classics might be admired as a new way of doing film history. Technically, however, if we're talking film history, the summer-camp youth-slasher subgenre on which *Hiker Meat* is allegedly based is a phenomenon of the 1980s rather than the 1970s, and we are puzzled by the emphasis on minor B-films rather than the period's masterful *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* or *Halloween*.

As we listen to the talking heads – say, twentysomething music composer Euan Rodger, sporting a cool haircut and on-trend button-up shirt, or the Northern-accented props-builder, with his funky art-student hat, busy constructing an immense worm's head – we ask ourselves whether these guys are 'real' or some hip casting agent's notion of what a trendy composer or artist-turned-propmaker might stereotypically look like if, perhaps, working on a hypothetical art-project 1970s-revival horror-movie set in 2013.

*Rough Cut*'s occasional, mildly captivating and ambiguous moments are better suited to gallery-viewing, where the visitor can stroll mid-film into the black box, watch whatever's on screen for as long as it's bearable and walk out, hopefully having caught a glimpse of one of the better moments – for example, writer Mike Harte explaining the film's entire storyline in about 45 seconds, mirroring perhaps the genre's similar side-interest in plausible plot.

The art world has become fixated on formerly invisible figures, such as curators, now occupying centre-stage as an exhibition's focus of attention. *Rough Cut* expands that process to filmmaking, whereby the hitherto unseen makeup artist, dolly operator, lighting technician et al bask briefly in the spotlight. They all seem to be having a tremendous time, laughing and joking at every turn, until *Rough Cut*'s infatuation with itself turns unbearably narcissistic. Everyone involved in the film process seems to have been taken into consideration – except the viewer, who leaves this horror-film experiment bored, rather than scared. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Bren O'Callaghan

#### Based on 'Hiker Meat' by

Mike Harte

#### Director of Photography

John Grey

#### Editors

Adam Milburn

Jamie Shovlin

#### Soundtrack

Euan Rodger

#### Sound Recordist

Arturo Aranguren

@[no company given]

#### Production Companies

A film by Jamie Shovlin

Co-commissioned by Cornerhouse

Artist Film, Toronto

International Film Festival

With support in kind from Forest Art Works

Cornerhouse is funded by Arts Council

England, AGMA: Association of Greater Manchester Authorities, British Film Institute, Europa Cinemas, Manchester City Council

#### Executive Producer

Sarah Perks

#### Cast

##### physical cast

Agnes Aspen

Eva

Ashley Houston

Mike

Bob Young

Chuck

Jack Dearsley

Frank

Helen Batchelor

Anne

Aaron Cobham

Jessie

Adam Spencer

Clark

Hannah Dalby

Lauren

Alex Moran

Louis

Chris Paul Daniels

John  
Amy Andrea Murray  
Eve

#### vocal cast

Grace Duval

Johnston

Eva

Ashley Houston

Mike

Matt Aistrup

Chuck/Frank

Jay Booton

Jesse/Louis

Lucia Cox

Anne

Gemma Ryan

Lauren

Gagun Chhina

Clark

Chrissy Chapman

additional voices

Mike Harte

worm

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Distributor

Cornerhouse

**A 'making of' documentary by artist Jamie Shovlin detailing the production of a recent 70s-revival teen horror movie entitled 'Hiker Meat' – which, in fact, does not exist.**

POW dramas in which enemies are beasts and upper lips are stiff (*The Colditz Story*, *The Wooden Horse*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*), particularly since adherence to the veterans' continuing code of silence keeps Lomax locked in his memories and contributes to his friend Finlay's suicide. Repression, that most English of responses, and the mental agonies that accompany it are laid out with exquisite accuracy in Colin Firth's contained, diffident portrait of Lomax. From *Tumbledown* (1988) through *A Single Man* (2009) and *The King's Speech* (2010), Firth has peerlessly portrayed the wounded Englishman, conveying a world of hurt in the momentary dart of an alarmed eye, fear shuttering his face. He's well matched by Jeremy Irvine's dogged portrayal of the young Lomax in the substantial WWII flashbacks, quelling his shudders as he steps up for a vicious beating for making an illicit radio. However, Nicole Kidman as Patti, the bewildered second wife prompting Lomax to open up, has little more to play with than quivering sympathy and plot prompts.

Though nicely sketched, Eric and Patti's shy love story – followed from a clumsy train flirtation to his near-breakdown – makes the film something of a slow starter. Screenwriters Frank Cottrell Boyce and Andy Paterson have plaited the wartime and the 80s plots together to give the audience the triple suspense of watching the marriage judder while uncovering POW atrocities and following Lomax's quest for revenge as he travels to Thailand to find his nemesis Nagase. Only the second and third strands really gel, however – it's the two-timeframe relationship between the former enemies that grips, once it's allowed to get under way. As Lomax holds a stoical Nagase at knifepoint, reversing the original interrogations with icy intensity, the film finally shakes off most of its tasteful reserve and becomes genuinely compelling. Even the visual treatment brightens, the restrained shots and muddy palette of 80s Scotland giving way to sharp white light and the occasional vertiginous dolly zoom. (As Lomax flashes back to the waterboarding that nearly broke him, cinephiles might also flash back to a similar scene in John Krish's 1959 film *Captured*, which had a claustrophobic close-up horror that eludes these scenes.)

Rather better is the mutual recognition that slowly infuses the older men's confrontation, with Sanada Hiroyuki's calmly remorseful Nagase a great foil for Firth's banked rage. There's a final unbidden reflection on the changing depiction of the WWII POW experience in the surfacing of *Merry Christmas* Mr Lawrence-style themes of common affinities succeeding culture clashes. But the film's real achievement is in making reconciliation feel as satisfying on screen as revenge. It nimbly turns the theme of honour from the stiff, polarised convictions of the young enemies to something transformative. What eventually unites the men is finding honour in compassion for one another – Nagase offering a bone-deep apology for his actions, Lomax tendering the total forgiveness that will liberate them both. The finale forms a long-overdue tender and supple moment, in a film whose stiffness otherwise denies it the emotional impact that's its due. ☺

## Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorf's

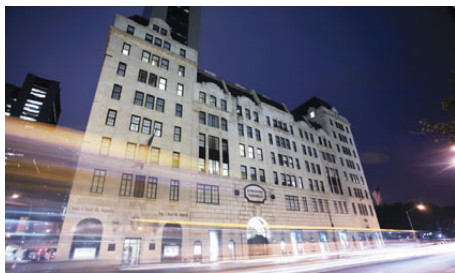
USA 2013, Director: Matthew Miele  
Certificate PG 93m 33s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Early on in *Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorf's*, the film and television producer Jean Doumanian locates the iconic Fifth Avenue department store's relevance within the American Dream: "If a young girl's going to college, she can't wait to become a lawyer so she can buy a pair of shoes she's been looking at. Everyone wants to better themselves, and that's why I think stores like this are necessary to make them aspire to bigger and better things."

Such oversimplified understandings of psychology and capitalism are to be expected in a hagiography of a high-end department store, but the moneyed talking heads in Matthew Miele's documentary are given such brief screen time that their statements are completely divorced from reality: the store's lavish window displays are examples of 'multicultural engagement'; personal shoppers perform an essential service; fashion director Linda Fargo's visit to former reality star (and daughter of Tommy) Ally Hilfiger's studio is proof of Bergdorf's commitment to finding new designers.

Fashion is by nature disposable, but *Scatter* (like 2009's *The September Issue*) says very little about the process of determining what's fashionable and instead focuses on the pomp and importance of Bergdorf Goodman as a concept. With a muddled chronology interspersed with boring anecdotes about past celebrity clients' excesses, the myth-building on display is neither believable nor interesting to those inside the fashion industry, and reinforces the impenetrability of that world to those outside it. 



*Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorf's*

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Mallory Andrews	<b>Production Companies</b> Quixotic Endeavors presents in association with Berney Films & BG Productions A Matthew Miele Film	Iris E. Wagner Chris Walker
<b>Written by</b> Matthew Miele		narrated by <b>William Fichtner</b>
<b>Director of Photography</b> Justin Bare	<b>Executive Producers</b> Andrew Malloy Bob Berney Jeanne R. Berney Steve McCarthy	<b>Dolby Digital In Colour</b> [L.85:1]
<b>Edited by</b> Justin Bare		<b>Distributor</b> Curzon Film World
<b>Sound</b> Frederick Albright Everett Wong		<b>8,419 ft +8 frames</b>
©[none given]		


A documentary outlining the cultural significance of Manhattan's Bergdorf Goodman department store, past and present, through interviews with fashion designers, celebrities and staff members. Founded in 1899 by a tailor and his apprentice, the luxury store now spans a full block and caters to an exclusive international clientele. The film also profiles a handful of staff members, and follows the months-long creation of the store's elaborate Christmas window display.

## Tamla Rose

United Kingdom 2013  
Director: Joe Scott  
Certificate 12A 108m 58s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

A Diana Ross and the Supremes-style trajectory of success and internal discord is given a contemporary reprise with a trio of Merseyside schoolgirls in this desperately poor backstage drama, which misguidedly calculates that naming its protagonist Tamla and boasting a string of vintage soul-inflected new numbers will somehow conjure up the spirit of Motown.

Robbie Pollard and Laura Walton's neatly turned songs are the only worthwhile element here, since the storyline's a dismal amalgam of the predictable and the convenient, the acting adequate at best (sometimes rather less so) and the musical background unconvincing given that Liverpool appears to be dominated by a single music-business Mr Big controlling the only viable label and recording studio. Worst of all, writer-director Joe Scott fights a losing battle in synching the soundtrack with the staged performances, making it hard to believe that his perky schoolgirl trio are knocking them dead – not least when the minimal production values can't quite run to showing a real audience. 



*Mersey sound: Merry, Alfa, Johnston*

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Lesley Wright	<b>Production Companies</b> An Ace film production Ace Film presents a Warm Heart production <b>Executive Producer</b> Jake Seal	Shane Hunter <b>Leon Tagoe</b> Joey Miller <b>Lindzi Germaine</b> Jane Miller
<b>Producer</b> Ann Scott		<b>Dolby Digital In Colour</b> [L.85:1]
<b>Written by</b> Joe Scott		<b>Distributor</b> UK Film and Music
<b>Director of Photography</b> David Read		<b>9,807ft +0 frames</b>
<b>Editor</b> Andrew McKee	<b>Cast</b> <b>Adi Alfa</b> Tamla Rose Miller <b>Alexandra Johnston</b> Lily Roberts <b>Tisha Merry</b> Candi Shimm <b>Jake Abraham</b> Jim <b>Phillip Olivier</b> Kyle <b>Errol Smith</b>	
<b>Art Designer</b> Jan Brown		
<b>Composers</b> Robbie Pollard Laura Walton		
<b>Sound Designer</b> Niko Metten		
<b>Costume Designer</b> Rachael Prime		
©[no company given]		

Liverpool, 2008. Schoolgirl Tamla Rose has a crush on local soul artist Shane Hunter. She persuades her friends Lily and Candi to audition as his backing singers. He relegates them to a supporting slot but the girls build up a following and cut a series of hit records. When record-company boss Kyle decides to spotlight Candi as the star, the trio split. Candi goes solo, Lily marries and Tamla turns to alcohol.

Five years later, Tamla is a barely functioning alcoholic. However, recording a duet with Shane, whose career is in the doldrums, restores her fortunes, while helping Kyle's former backing singer Phyllis to defeat Kyle in a legal battle for royalties rebuilds her spirits. A new record contract and romance with Shane promise a brighter future.

## This Ain't California

Germany 2012  
Director: Marten Persiel

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

Imagine a documentary about the skateboarding scene in East Germany during the late 1980s. Imagine a treasure trove of woozy, sun-soaked 8 and 16mm footage showing a small close-knit group of friends as they skate the vast concrete spaces of Berlin's Alexanderplatz in the shadow of the Television Tower – reel after reel of stunts, jumps and tricks, with some petty vandalism, teen romance and cross-border skateboard-smuggling thrown in. Imagine if this was intercut with footage of GDR newsreaders warning of skating as capitalist corruption, and interviews with the Stasi agent who monitored the friends' crew – and all of it framed by present-day interviews with the scene's survivors, filmed in the ruins of the East Berlin apartment block where the friends grew up.

The problem with *This Ain't California* is that imagining it is essentially what director Marten Persiel has done. A notional documentary, his film quite shamelessly conceals the fact that it is mostly acted, its home-movie 'sources' shot in the present day. Alert viewers will notice – the sheer wealth of home movies he has to draw on feels too good to be true, and the explanation given is too convenient. The real giveaway is the clear difference between the two young actors who play 'Denis Paracek' as a child and as a teenager (they're so flagrantly unlike that Persiel may even have intended it to be the film's 'tell'). Essentially Persiel has looked at the classic conundrum for any documentarian – what material can I find and use? – and answered it by simply making his own. He's not just having his cake and eating it, he's gone back to the kitchen to bake himself an even bigger cake.

Would Persiel have been able to produce a film without these embellishments? He uses interviews with genuine veterans from East Germany's skate scene, but a documentary about skating composed completely of talking heads would feel inadequate to the subject-matter, especially given that skating has a decades-long DIY film culture of its own, built on the same basic building blocks as *This Ain't California* (home-movie footage of friends attempting increasingly crazy moves and jumps). Passing off the fictional as factual is after all a long and noble artistic tradition – almost every major text at the inception of the British novel pulled the same trick (*Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, *Pamela*, even *Gulliver's Travels*). In interviews, Persiel, while cagey about historical details, has talked about the film's deeper veracity, echoing Werner Herzog's ideas on 'ecstatic truth' trumping the factual. And it's true that *This Ain't California* 'feels' authentic. It doesn't, though, have any of the surprising counterintuitive details that true documentary turns up. If you've seen *Lords of Dogtown* and *Good Bye Lenin!*, then Persiel's film has little to add beyond adding them together. Perhaps *This Ain't California* tells us as much that is 'true' about the present day as it does about the German Democratic Republic of the late 1980s. The faux-vintage filter Instagram has been massively successful for the way it can impart an instant aura, something evocative and emotive, to the most banal details of everyday life. *This Ain't California* feels like the Instagramification



## Thor The Dark World

USA 2013

Director: Alan Taylor

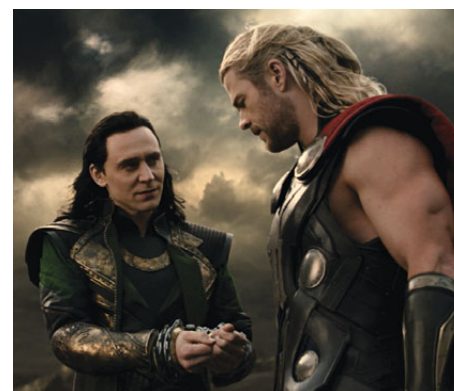
Certificate 12A 111m 53s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Assessing a problem that has arisen with Thor ever since Stan Lee, Jack Kirby and Larry Lieber mashed up Norse legend with the Marvel superhero universe in *Journey into Mystery* #83, comics writer and editor Len Wein said: "You can have all the adventures you like in Asgard, but every so often you have to go back to Earth and take your lumps from the Absorbing Man." What makes Marvel's Thor distinct from any other saga's thunder god is his interaction with regular people – and irregular people such as long-time villain the Absorbing Man, who is off the table for Marvel-Disney's movie universe since his power-set was used by Ang Lee for another character in *Hulk* (2003). Kenneth Branagh's *Thor* (2011) didn't skimp on the Asgardian epic but grounded itself literally by having Chris Hemsworth's buff yet naive hero learning humility on Earth when surrounded by smart, cynical, wiseass Marvel Comics humans.

This sequel, which has to follow up the development of the Thor-Loki conflict from Joss Whedon's *Avengers Assemble* (2012) as well as the storyline of *Thor*, has a firm grasp on Marvel's cosmic vision, presenting an impressive amalgamation of ancient mythology and space opera, as elves and Asgardians have at each other with battleaxes and laser-blasters. This is the sort of material Kirby or Jim Starlin specialised in, though the Big Bad of *The Dark World* is Christopher Eccleston's Malekith the Dark Elf, a Two-Face-look villain from Walt Simonson's impressive (if Asgard-heavy) run on Thor. Unfortunately, Simonson's tricky Malekith is here reduced to a snarling cipher upstaged by Tom Hiddleston's returning Loki, who is again the most complicated of the Norse characters. The macguffin super-weapon (tendrils of red force) associated with Malekith is much less satisfying than the comics' Casket of Ancient Winters.

Alan Taylor, who impressed with the 1995 crime movie *Palookaville* but has mostly worked



Norse force: Tom Hiddleston, Chris Hemsworth

in quality TV (*The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, *Game of Thrones*), shows confidence in filling the screen with cutting-edge effects and action but is undone by a script that feels cobbled together and unfinished. Stellan Skarsgård and Kat Dennings are stuck with feeble comedy relief and the spark between Hemsworth and Natalie Portman's Jane doesn't quite ignite as the love story winds through a tale in which too much (the whole universe) is at stake for audiences to care about. Last time round, Jane knew more than the still-irrepressible Thor; here she's a passive vessel and he has to be earnest, grieving and a bit of a dullard. Even Hiddleston's Loki, seething with multiple resentments and plotting double-crosses three films ahead, could do with snappier lines.

It's nice to see Rene Russo as Thor's mother Frigga. Her best moments in *Thor* were deleted scenes on the DVD release but here she's the crux of the plot – and giving her a fight scene was a great idea. However, killing her off to motivate her sons for the rest of the picture is a crass example of a comic-book trope – raping, murdering or mutilating female characters as part of a male character's plot arc – that's been heavily and justifiably criticised lately. **S**



Leap of faith: *This Ain't California*

of an entire film and says something about the degree to which its lo-fi signifiers have become shorthand for innocence and honesty.

*This Ain't California* has not only been shown in documentary sections of several film festivals but has also won awards, which is both a testament to Persiel's cheek and worrying for the festivals' screening policies. Those festival successes could be classed as harmless art pranking. But the fact that Persiel kills off a central character and then dedicates the film to his memory with the final frame, before continuing his fictional-factual sleight-of-hand by leaving the cast off the credits, can only leave an unpleasant taste. Waiting until the end of those credits it seems only logical to find that even the soundtrack – an excellent and evocative mixture of the era's post-punk and electro-pop sounds – is a present-day fabrication. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Ronald Vietz Michael Schöbel	<b>Music</b> Lars Damm Troy von Balthazar	<b>In Colour and Black and White</b> [1.78:1] Subtitles
<b>Script</b> Marten Persiel Ira Wedel	<b>Sound Design</b> Ireneusz Szumlanski Elias Struck	<b>Distributor</b> Luxin
<b>Director of Photography</b> Felix Leiberger	<b>Costume Design</b> Simone Eichhorn	
<b>Editors</b> Maxine Goedicke Bobby Good Toni Froschhammer	<b>@Wildfremd</b> <b>Production Companies</b> Wildfremd	
<b>Production Designer</b> Anne Zentgraf	<b>Production and Arte</b> RBB, MDR presents a Marten Persiel film	

A documentary-style film about the skateboarding scene in East Germany in the late 1980s. Focused on a trio of childhood friends, in particular Denis 'Panik' Paracek, it shows the sport taking root and flourishing in the GDR, despite the shortage of boards and accessories. The skaters move to Berlin and slowly make connections with other scenes around the world. After German reunification the group disperses; Panik later joins the German army and is killed in Afghanistan in 2011. Interviews with skaters in the present day frame the narrative, which is told using a mixture of reconstruction, archival material and animation.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producer</b> Kevin Feige	<b>Editor</b> Dan Lebental Wyatt Smith	Marvel Entertainment presents a Marvel Studios production	Jane Foster <b>Tom Hiddleston</b> Loki	Volstag <b>Zachary Levi</b> Fandral	[2.35:1]
<b>Screenplay</b> Christopher L. Yost Christopher Markus Stephen McFeely	<b>Production Designer</b> Charles Wood	<b>Executive Producers</b> Louis D'Esposito Victoria Alonso Craig Kyle Alan Fine Nigel Gostelow Stan Lee	<b>Stellan Skarsgård</b> Dr Erik Selvig <b>Idris Elba</b> Heimdall <b>Christopher Eccleston</b> Malekith <b>Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje</b> Algrim/Kurse <b>Kat Dennings</b> Darcy Lewis <b>Ray Stevenson</b>	<b>Tadanobu Asano</b> Hogun <b>Jaimie Alexander</b> Sif <b>Rene Russo</b> Frigga <b>Anthony Hopkins</b> Odin	Some screenings presented in 3D
<b>Story</b> Don Payne Robert Rodat Based on the Marvel comic book by Stan Lee, Larry Lieber, Jack Kirby	<b>Music</b> Brian Tyler	<b>Sound</b> David Stephenson	<b>Cast</b> <b>Chris Hemsworth</b> Thor <b>Natalie Portman</b>	<b>Dolby Digital/ Datasat/ Dolby Atmos</b> In Colour	<b>Distributor</b> Buena Vista International (UK)
<b>Director of Photography</b> Kramer Morgenthau	<b>Costume Designer</b> Wendy Partridge	<b>Stunt Co-ordinator</b> Steve Dent			10,069ft +8 frames
	<b>Production Companies</b>				

Malekith, leader of the Dark Elves, was once vanquished by Bor, grandfather of Asgardian god Thor. He revives in the present day, intent on using the power of the Aether, a mystic force, to destroy the Nine Realms constituting our universe. Physicist Jane Foster, Thor's mortal girlfriend, investigates an anomaly in London, where the dimensional barriers that separate the Nine Realms have thinned, and is accidentally infused with Aether. Against the wishes of his father Odin, Thor brings Jane to Asgard to be treated. Algrim, Malekith's lieutenant, infiltrates Asgard, posing as a prisoner; he murders

Thor's mother Frigga and opens the way for Malekith to seize Jane and take the Aether. Thor releases his foster brother Loki from an Asgardian dungeon, offering him a chance to avenge Frigga if he accompanies him on a quest to save Jane and the world. Loki sacrifices himself in battle, giving Thor the opportunity to best Malekith in a struggle that takes place as the Nine Realms come into conjunction at the Greenwich meridian. Odin offers Thor the throne of Asgard, but he refuses; Loki has somehow survived and is impersonating Odin. Thor returns to Earth to be with Jane.

## Walesa Man of Hope

Director: Andrzej Wajda  
Certificate 12A 124m 14s

### Reviewed by Geoffrey Macnab

Most biopics about historical figures are made long after the subjects have died and by filmmakers who didn't directly know them. Andrzej Wajda's *Walesa: Man of Hope* is an exception to this general rule, since the venerable director (born in 1926) is almost 20 years older than shipyard electrician turned political leader Lech Walesa (born in 1943). Wajda lived through the seismic years of the 1970s and early 1980s in Poland, a period that culminated in free elections and the end of communist rule, and he has chronicled the upheaval and uncertainty of these times in *Man of Marble* (1977) and *Man of Iron* (1981).

Wajda's last major feature *Katyn* (2007) was regarded by many as a likely final testament from one of the titans of Polish cinema. An account of the 1940 massacre of Polish officers by the Soviet authorities, it was received respectfully enough but was also thought by many to be old-fashioned. In 2009 he made the chamber piece *Sweet Rush*, but seemed too old and frail by then to tackle a project as demanding as the Walesa movie. What most impresses about *Man of Hope*, then, especially in its first half, is its energy, its abrasiveness. Wajda uses newsreel footage and punk music in his recreation of the protests of 1970, and there is grim footage of protesters being beaten up by the authorities. Walesa himself is arrested and made to sign documents saying that he will collaborate with the regime.

These scenes are seen in flashback. Janusz Glowacki's screenplay opens with Walesa giving an interview to celebrated Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci (Maria Rosaria Omaggio) in early 1981, and then slips seamlessly back in time. Robert Wieckiewicz gives a stirring performance as Walesa, capturing his bluntness and charisma. The film balances its account of the rise of free trade union Solidarity and the Gdansk shipyard strikes with insights into Walesa's family life. He is a happily married Catholic with several children who is continually shown combining his political duties with pushing his babies around in a pram. One aspect of 1970s Polish society that Wajda clearly knew at first hand is the censorship and surveillance. Walesa is constantly followed by the authorities; anyone who visits him, Fallaci included, is filmed.

Wajda plays up the absurdism and Kafkaesque quality of life in the Polish communist state in its final years. Walesa is arrested on a regular basis, often seemingly with his baby in tow. His wife Danuta (the improbably glamorous Agnieszka Grochowska) is frequently caught up in his battles with the authorities too. In one scene, when their apartment is being searched by the cops, we see her hiding copies of an underground newspaper in a pan of stew that she's cooking on the stove. In another, when she is heading back from Norway after collecting the Nobel Peace Prize on Walesa's behalf, she is strip-searched purely to humiliate her.

At the same time that the family is being targeted by the communist authorities, it also suffers at the hands of the anti-communist protesters. After Walesa becomes Solidarity leader and a folk hero, the underground movement treats his tiny apartment as a meeting place.



Pole-axed: Robert Wieckiewicz

The media won't leave him alone either. In one comic scene, we see the Walesa family sitting down to watch an episode of American miniseries *Rich Man, Poor Man* on their battered old TV before the inevitable interruption occurs. The only way Lech and Danuta can safeguard their privacy is by hanging a sign on their front door warning of a typhus outbreak.

Walesa's legacy is a matter of fierce debate. In recent years he has been heavily criticised for his remarks about everything from the Polish

gay community's political rights to Poland's relationship with Germany. Wajda's film shows him at an earlier, simpler point in his political career, when all that concerned him was the fight against the authorities. *Man of Hope* captures his stubbornness and his courage. The intellectuals label him a "working-class chauvinist" but he is far more effective than they are. Walesa, Wajda's movie suggests, was precisely the blunt tool needed to bring down the oppressive Soviet-backed communist state. 🇵🇱

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Michał Kwieciński

#### Screenplay

Janusz Glowacki

#### Director of Photography

Paweł Edelman

#### Editing

Grażyna Gradon

Milena Fiedler

#### Production Designer

Magdalena Dipont

#### Music

Paweł Mykietyń

#### Sound

Jacek Hamela

#### Costume Designer

Magdalena Biedrzycka

#### Production Companies

Akson Studio

Co-produced by

Orange, TVP –

Telewizja Polska

S.A., NCK – National

Center for Culture,

CANAL+

#### Co-financing by

Polish Film Institute

Sponsored by Energa

and Saur Neptun

#### Executive Producers

Katarzyna

Fukacz-Cebula

Malgorzata

Fogel-Gabrys

#### Cast

Robert Wieckiewicz

Lech Walesa

Agnieszka

Grochowska

Danuta Walesa

Zbigniew

Zamachowski

Nawisław

Cezary Kosinski

Majchrzak

Maria Rosaria

Omaggio

Oriana Fallaci

Mirosław Baka

Klemens Gniech,

director of the

shipyard

#### Maciej Stuhr

priest

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Subtitles

#### Distributor

Project London Films

11.181 ft +0 frames

Polish theatrical title

Walesa. Człowiek

z nadziei

Poland, 1981. Celebrated Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci arrives to interview electrician turned trade-union leader Lech Walesa. In flashback, we learn how Walesa became leader of the Solidarity movement. He recalls the 1970 protests at the Gdansk shipyard, during which several workers were killed. At the time, Walesa was bringing up a young family with his wife Danuta. He was constantly tailed by the security forces, who arrested him on several occasions and made him sign documents agreeing to cooperate with the authorities. Walesa was eventually sacked from his job at the shipyard. Nonetheless, when the 1980 strike began, he re-entered the shipyard and took over leadership of the strike. The authorities initially gave in to the strikers' demands, but when Solidarity was created and strikers throughout the country demanded free elections, the government responded by introducing martial law. The authorities tried to blackmail and intimidate Walesa into calling off the strikes. When he refused, he was held in confinement but was eventually released. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which Danuta accepted on his behalf. In 1989, free elections were held, paving the way for the break-up of the other Soviet bloc countries.



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# Home cinema



A brush with Death: Jeremy Clyde in the title role in *Schalcken the Painter*

## LOOK INTO THE DARK

The lights were going out all over 70s Britain – and the darkest place of all was on TV, where gothic horror was flourishing

### ROBIN REDBREAST

James MacTaggart; UK 1970; BFI/Region 2 DVD; 77 minutes; Certificate 12; 1.33:1; Features: interview with John Bowen (2013), 'Around the Village Green' (Evelyn Spice and Marion Grierson, 1937), booklet

### DEAD OF NIGHT

THE EXORCISM/RETURN FLIGHT/  
A WOMAN SOBBIING

Don Taylor/Rodney Bennett/Paul Ciappessoni; UK 1972; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 1.33:1; Features: gallery of stills from missing episodes, downloadable scripts for the missing episodes (PDF), booklet

### SUPERNATURAL

Robert Muller; UK 1977; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 400 minutes; 1.33:1

### SCHALCKEN THE PAINTER

Leslie Megahey; UK 1979; BFI/Region 2 DVD and Region B Blu-ray Dual Format; Certificate 15; 70 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: 'The Pit' (Edward Abraham, 1962), 'The Pledge' (Digby Rumsey, 1981), 'Look into the Dark' (2013), booklet with essays by Vic Pratt, Ben Herve and James Bell

### Reviewed by Jonathan Rigby

In Don Taylor's 1972 TV play *The Exorcism*, four self-satisfied champagne socialists propose to tuck into their Christmas dinner in a ritzy converted rural barn. Then there's a power cut. And yet it's more than that. For, as one of them points out, the telephone is out of action too.

I'm always reminded by this little detail of Boris Karloff's lisping utterance in the 1934 classic *The Black Cat* – "Even the phone is dead." But Taylor's power cut pointed forward as well as back, for some 12 months after *The Exorcism* was first screened, Britain started experiencing blackouts on a regular basis. For a proud nation that not long before had imagined it was basking in 'the white heat' of Harold Wilson's technological revolution, this return to basics was a grievous affront. Yet in *The Exorcism* the affront to the assembled trendies rapidly acquires a metaphysical dimension. For the darkness *outside* the cottage, they notice, is absolutely total. As if the building were eerily suspended in time and space.

Here, perhaps, is a clue to the potency of Britain's television horror of the period. While the country's cinematic horrors, desperately casting about for new audiences, strangled themselves in a welter of blood, small-screen horror was, by definition, more contained, more measured, more scalp-pricklingly inward-looking.

There was no TV equivalent of the riotous gore and nudity of, say, *The Mutations*, *Horror Hospital* or

*The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (to take just three films in production during November 1972, the month *The Exorcism* went out). But there were plenty of glacial chillers that took a long, disquieting look into the impenetrable darkness lying just beyond the windows of a newly nervous nation.

Was 1970s Britain, racked by industrial unrest and paralysing rates of inflation, itself eerily suspended? Had everything stopped? Was this, to use the Shakespearean formulation, "the promised end"? One thing was certain – in this troubled atmosphere, Britain's television producers were adept at providing an "image of that horror".

For the BBC, the decade was bookended by two elegantly frightening one-off dramas, *Robin Redbreast* and *Schalcken the Painter*, that were screened just before Christmas 1970 and Christmas 1979 respectively. Thanks to the BFI, these two classics have now reached DVD (and, in *Schalcken's* case, Blu-ray) alongside two other valuable resurrections – the surviving episodes of *Dead of Night* (1972) and the complete run of *Supernatural* (1977).

Written by John Bowen and directed by James MacTaggart, *Robin Redbreast* was shot in colour for the *Play for Today* strand but survives only in (perfectly watchable) black and white. A milestone in Britain's longstanding tradition of rural horror, Bowen's play retains its grip despite a story that has since been echoed any number of times. Norah Palmer (a character recycled from



Bowen's 1962 novel *The Birdcage*) is a TV script editor – sophisticated, rootless, unsatisfied – who buys a country cottage and inadvertently finds herself the focal point of a murderous fertility rite.

Expertly balanced, sinister foreshadowings coexist here with touches of gruesome culture-clash humour. The queasy mixture leads first to a genuinely unsettling nightmare sequence, then to a brilliantly effective nocturnal siege, climaxing with an axe-wielding rustic emerging from the impeccably refurbished chimney breast.

With interest in esoteric religions at an all-time high at the turn of the 1970s, *Robin Redbreast* occupied a pivotal position, thematically as well as chronologically, between the urban folksiness of *Rosemary's Baby* and the offshore paganism of *The Wicker Man*. In another bit of Bowen recycling, Freda Bamford's quietly threatening Mrs Vigo reappeared in his 1977 *Play for Today* entry *A Photograph*, making one wonder if the BFI could get together further disturbing instalments from the same series – notably *Penda's Fen* (1974), *Red Shift* (1978) and *Vampires* (1979).

Though we feel for Anna Cropper's conflicted Norah in *Robin Redbreast*, it's much harder to sympathise with the rather similar characters inhabiting Taylor's *The Exorcism*, which was the first episode of *Dead of Night*. In particular, Dan (Clive Swift) is a patronising, pretentious twerp who enjoys "concentrating on how to be socialists and rich". The folk threat on this occasion isn't alive – yet nor is it really dead, for as a vengeful distillate of age-old social exclusion it exerts a ferocious power. Audaciously, the background to the haunting is given to us in a monologue lasting nearly nine minutes, in which Rachel (Cropper again) is possessed by the peasant woman who starved to death in the cottage along with her children centuries before.

Taylor saw the play more as Marxist polemic than supernatural horror, and the fusion gives rise to a few clunky moments. (Sylvia Kay's Margaret, for example, dutifully points out that "this is becoming a very moral tale" – as if we hadn't noticed.) But by and large the cross-fertilisation works wonders, particularly when Edmund (Edward Petherbridge) knocks back a "very good Burgundy" and tastes blood instead.

Sadly, of the six other episodes of *Dead of Night* only two are known to exist, and they duly join *The Exorcism* on the BFI's DVD release. Robert Holmes's *Return Flight* is a trifle, made moving by a typically excellent Peter Barkworth, but *A Woman Sobbing* (written by Bowen again) provides a brilliant counterpoint to *Robin Redbreast*. The turn of the 1970s was marked by more than just power cuts and a modish interest in paganism; it was also the flashpoint period for a freshly mobilised women's movement, which Bowen reflected in the pent-up frustration of bourgeois wife and mother Jane Pullar (Anna Massey). In her booklet notes, Lisa Kerrigan aptly compares *A Woman Sobbing* to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 story "The Yellow Wallpaper"; Bowen's 80-years-on update remains a skin-crawling exploration of the stifling effects of domesticity.

As if retreating from the urgent topicality of the gothic themes explored in *Robin*



Out of the shadows: *The Exorcism*

*Redbreast* and *Dead of Night*, *Supernatural* was a collection of eight period pieces in which Robert Muller speculated on the origins of the great horror archetypes. It has been speculated in turn that *Supernatural* was a ratings loser because it appeared in the summer rather than in the wintry slot such subjects normally commanded. It's more likely that it failed to catch on thanks to a conspicuously poor and pompously acted opening story, *Ghosts of Venice*.

Of the remainder, *Mr Nightingale* and *Lady Sybil* star two of the great names in television horror – respectively, Jeremy Brett and Denholm Elliott – but are otherwise unconvincing. *Countess Ilona* and *The Werewolf Reunion* constitute an enjoyable two-part gothic pastiche, presided over in style by Muller's wife Billie Whitelaw. Set partly in Budapest, *Viktoria* – written not by Muller but by Sue Lake – is a creepy reiteration of the homunculus theme. In *Night of the Marionettes*, the incomparable Vladek Sheybal offers a truly revolting glimpse into Mary Shelley's "workshop of filthy creation", while the concluding episode, *Dorabella*, is an oneiric cocktail of Coleridge's 'Christabel' and Le Fanu's *Carmilla*.

Perhaps inevitably, given that it anatomised the gothic themes popularised by Hammer,

*Small-screen horror was more contained, more measured, more scalp-pricklingly inward-looking*



Rustic nightmare: *Robin Redbreast*

*Supernatural* picked up a heavy Hammer flavour along the way, particularly in *Dorabella*, which uses castle matte shots bought in from *Scars of Dracula* (1970). Elsewhere, Hammer's old stamping ground, Oakley Court, is prominently featured in the series's credits montage and even more extensively in *Lady Sybil*.

Two years after playing the increasingly anaemic hero of *Dorabella*, Jeremy Clyde rejoined John Justin, *Dorabella*'s splendidly alarming vampire patriarch, in *Schalcken the Painter*. In 1839, Sheridan Le Fanu concocted a grisly gothic fiction from the lives of 17th-century painters Gerrit Dou and Godfried Schalcken, flavouring it with a perfect symbol for the living death conferred by arranged marriages – Dou selling his 16-year-old niece Rose Velderkaust to Death himself in the person of a fabulously rich green-skinned zombie called Wilken Vanderhausen. A hundred and forty years later, Leslie Megahey – newly appointed editor of the BBC's *Omnibus* strand – combined arts documentary and horror story in a thoroughly mesmerising 70-minute adaptation rendered in the coldly seductive hues of the Flemish Old Masters.

Right at the beginning, Schalcken invites us (aptly enough) to "look into the dark". The languid rhythm imposed by Megahey is crucial to the film's cumulative effect, suggesting that Dutch painters of the period were themselves suspended in time and space, maybe even playing out a money-fixated living death of their own. (Even Rembrandt passes through.) Megahey cleverly embroiders Le Fanu's original here and there, increasing the horror. In the story Vanderhausen announces himself with a mere sniff; here he's introduced with a superbly ominous creaking of floorboards. And Schalcken's fecklessness is punished at the end by a truly nightmarish tableau in which he imagines that even nice girls enjoy necrophilia.

Intriguingly, Megahey is just as capable of quoting classic horror films as Flemish masterworks; when Schalcken is frightened by the unexpected snorting of a horse, the reference to the 1945 Karloff vehicle *The Body Snatcher* is unmistakable. Mellifluously narrated by Charles Gray – and beautifully acted by John Justin, Jeremy Clyde, Maurice Denham and Cheryl Kennedy – Megahey's *Schalcken* is itself a masterwork.

The BFI discs feature some fascinating extras, among them Edward Abraham's strikingly designed Poe vignette *The Pit* (1962) and Digby Rumsey's highly atmospheric Lord Dunsany adaptation *The Pledge* (1981). There are also illuminating interviews with Bowen, Megahey and *Schalcken* cinematographer John Hooper. Though *Supernatural* looks noticeably muddier than its companions, the main achievement of these releases is to bestow a digital afterlife on programmes previously embalmed as foggy bootlegs.

They also remind us of that queasy period in the 1970s when things were so bad it seemed they couldn't get any worse – and when supernatural TV was so good it seemed unlikely to get any better. **S**

# New releases

## THE BEAUTY OF THE DEVIL

René Clair; France 1950; Cohen Film Collection/  
Region A Blu-ray; 96 minutes; 1.37:1; Features:  
documentary featurette, trailers

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Once considered among the French masters and indisputably one of the saviours of the early talkie era, René Clair took it in the knees from the original *Cahiers du cinéma* crowd in the 50s, and his reputation plummeted into a critical darkness from which it is yet to fully re-emerge.

Truffaut and co tsf-tsked at exactly what makes forgotten 1950 fantasy *The Beauty of the Devil* so fascinating: Clair's lavish studio-bound artifice (using the cavernous Cinecittà spaces in this Italian co-pro), narrative hyperconstruction and quintessentially French effervescence. A full-frontal version of the Faust legend, the film has scenery-munching stars Michel Simon and Gérard Philipe playing both Dr Faust and Mephistopheles in turn, young and old, swapping contrasting identities right and left during the much fabled negotiations between soul's worth and earthly attainment, and the result is a kind of narrative gamesmanship run amok. Until, that is, the demon takes permanent earthly form, in a new New Testament kind of twist, and finds himself on the hook for alchemical scandal.

There are plenty of inspired detours, including a masterful sequence foretelling Faust's powerful future – he betrays, kills and even invents atomic warfare – all of it shot by Clair and neglected DP Michel Kelber (who lensed famous films for Renoir, Cocteau and Nicholas Ray) with breathtaking through-the-mirror subterfuge. But for all the movie's visual gorgeousness, it stands as perhaps the most philosophical and most modern of all Faust films; moral issues of desire and happiness are twisted into knots, and social catastrophe of a post-Hiroshima sort loom large. Typically for Clair, the hero's ultimate salvation lies not with the angels or with Simone Valère's love-interest princess, but in a gypsy caravan with a loving brunette, in a sweet climactic 20-year echo of the director's own *A nous la liberté*. Essential movieness.

**Disc:** Lovely to look at. The accompanying 50-minute Gaumont documentary interviews a handful of Clair scholars and co-workers, and thoroughly details the master's history and the working relationships on the film, shedding particular light on the fact that, although the movie was successful, it was overshadowed by its echo of the Stockholm Appeal, an initiative against nuclear weapons begun by French physicist Frédéric Joliot-Curie and approved by the World Peace Council a day before its release.

## THE CRIMINAL CODE

Howard Hawks; USA 1931; TCM Vault Collection/Region 1 DVD; 97 minutes; 1.20:1; Features: Robert Osborne introduction, publicity and scene stills, movie posters

**Reviewed by Peter Tonguette**

True to form, Howard Hawks sets us at ease. *The Criminal Code* is one of the director's earliest sound films, and we worry at first that it will lack the distinctive quality of the classics he made only a few years later, such as *Twentieth Century* (1934) and *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), but Hawks's handiwork is obvious from the beginning. Two detectives sit hunched over a card table squabbling over the finer points of pinochle. A call comes in – there has been a melee at a nightclub. The men hop to it – an example of Hawks's much discussed esteem for 'professionalism' – but they're still bickering as they arrive at Spelvin's Café – an example of the director's equally noteworthy sense of humour. "Say, listen," the one says to the other, "when we get back off this call, I'm gonna have Rudy draw you up a set of rules."

Phillips Holmes stars as Robert Graham, a clean-cut employee of a brokerage firm who, drunk on gin, makes the mistake of defending the honour of his date by killing a man who calls her a vulgar name. In private, district attorney Mark Brady (Walter Huston) empathises with Graham, but throws the book at him when push comes to shove. The film is unusually preoccupied with ideas about honour. Recounting the Spelvin's incident to Brady, the girl can't hide her doe-eyed pride at being referred to as a "lady" when she

repeats what Graham said to her tormentor before attacking him: "You've insulted this lady."

Once incarcerated, Graham befriends prisoner Ned Galloway (Boris Karloff), who has a thing about 'squealing'. A major subplot concerns Galloway's attempts to mete out justice to fellow inmates who have gone against 'the criminal code', leading to an impressive passage (later excerpted in Peter Bogdanovich's *Targets*, also starring Karloff) in which Galloway conspires to be alone in a room with a squealer, whereupon he softly walks towards him and takes out his switchblade. By then, Brady has become the prison's warden, and runs it as a sort of bizarre Victorian outpost; Galloway is nominally a butler in Brady's family's quarters, while Graham is soon his chauffeur.

For much of the film, Huston makes Brady a thoroughly unlikeable figure: after becoming warden, he invites his daughter (Constance Cummings) to his office window to join him in surveying his unhappy charges – all 2,552 of them. In the end, however, he takes the moral high ground by insisting that Graham expose Galloway as the man responsible for the death of the squealer. It is only fitting that this basically honourable character is played by the actor who, a year earlier, was D.W. Griffith's Abraham Lincoln.

**Disc:** This new-to-DVD film is included in the three-disc set *Karloff: Criminal Kind*, which also includes *The Guilty Generation* (1931) and *Behind the Mask* (1932).

## DR MABUSE, DER SPIELER

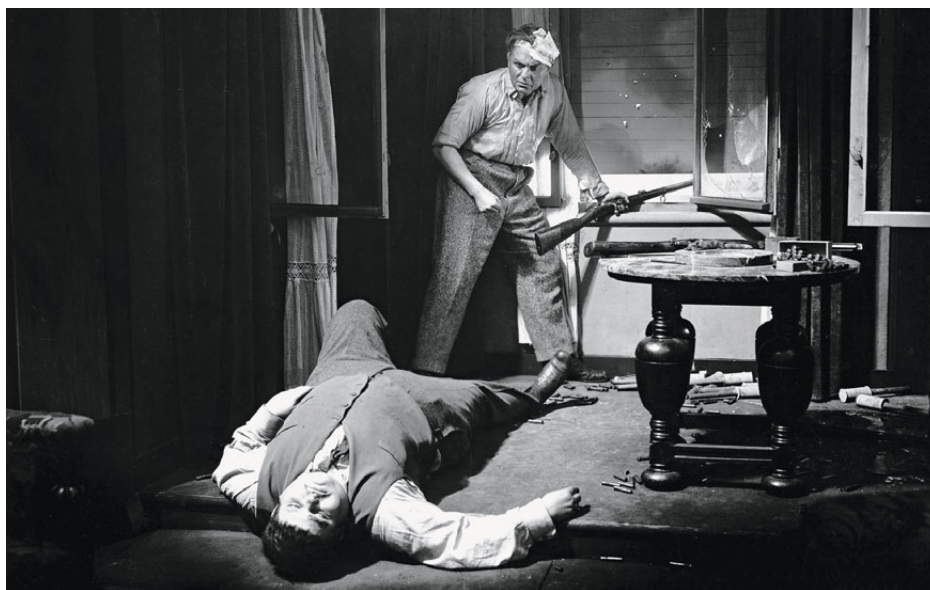
Fritz Lang; Germany 1922; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/  
Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 281 minutes; 1.37:1; Features:  
audio commentary by David Kalat, three featurettes, booklet

**Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson**

A master criminal, adept at disguise, amasses an unheard-of fortune by mesmerising his opponents at the card table and running a continent-wide ring of operatives who steal, cheat and manipulate the stock market. So far, so enjoyably villainous, but Fritz Lang transplants the Dr Mabuse of Norbert Jacques's pulp fiction to something like a documentary, a painting of its era that's both a thriller and an exposé of the frail Weimar Republic. As victims and henchmen alike are enthralled by the drunken doctor who scribbles memoranda on banknotes, a seedy city easily recognised as Berlin is corrupted by crime, drugs and hyperinflation.

There are further complications. This monumental film is really cleft into two parts, rising and falling with Mabuse himself: 'The Great Gambler: An Image of the Age' and 'Inferno: A Game for the People of Our Age'. Despite the first part's many sociological portents, the inferno in the second part's title refers largely to a psychological hell. Mabuse's public face is as a psychoanalyst, but secretly he uses his knowledge to provoke rather than cure mental disorder. The agonies are rendered by Lang in mad scenes layered with multiple exposures, and there is an unshakable image of a jail cell, once occupied by two heartsick women and expressionist shadows, subsequently empty and bleached clean by flat lighting.

The casting offers its own complexities. The shapeshifting über-villain is played



Suitable case for treatment: *Dr Mabuse, Der Spieler*



## WHOLE EARTH CATALOGUE

Some remarkable foreign films are being brought out of the shadows by Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Project

## WORLD CINEMA PROJECT: VOLUME 1

## DRY SUMMER/TRANCES/REVENGE

Metin Erksan/Ahmed El Maanouni/Ernek Shinarbaev; Turkey/Morocco/USSR 1964/81/89; Eureka/

Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 92/89/100 minutes; 1.37:1/1.66:1/1.37:1; Features:

Martin Scorsese introductions, booklet

## Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Given Martin Scorsese's much-touted Italian heritage, one occasionally can't help wondering whether Lorenzo de' Medici lurks somewhere in the family tree. His Film Foundation has already been much in the news, usually in connection with restorations of work by well-known names such as Powell and Pressburger, Alfred Hitchcock or Satyajit Ray, but his lesser-known World Cinema Foundation may prove even more valuable.

Founded in May 2007, the WCF is a non-profit organisation dedicated to restoring, preserving and promoting outstanding world cinema, with a particular focus on countries that lack the resources to take on the task themselves. To date, it has sponsored 23 restorations (full details can be found at <http://worldcinemaoundation.org>), with a geographical bias leaning heavily towards Africa, the Middle East and southern Asia.

These restorations are now being released on Blu-ray by various partner labels, including Eureka (in the UK), Criterion (in the US) and Carlotta (in France). Each is releasing a World Cinema Project Volume 1 box-set, albeit with only Ahmed El Maanouni's *Trances* common to all three. The other titles are *Dry Summer* (Criterion/Eureka), *Revenge* (Carlotta/Eureka), Emilio Gómez Muriel and Fred Zinnemann's *Redes* and Djibril Diop Mambéty's *Touki Bouki* (both Carlotta/Criterion), Kim Kiyoung's *The Housemaid* and Ritwik Ghatak's *A River Called Titas* (both Criterion only) – although it seems likely that all three territories will eventually see most if not all the titles, local rights situations permitting.

Eureka's box begins with one of the more obscure Berlin Golden Bear winners – although the booklet's claim that Metin Erksan's *Dry Summer* was wholly suppressed for nearly five decades is undermined by a 1970 UK release under the lurid if not inaccurate title *I Had My Brother's Wife*. However, since it was BBFC-snipped to 77 minutes from an already substantially cut 83, it was undoubtedly a pale shadow of the version under review. Despite this, Nigel Andrews was moderately enthusiastic, saying that while it didn't reach "the fetishistic heights" of either *Onibaba* or *Mademoiselle*, there was much to



Poetic justice: Alexandre Pan in Ernek Shinarbaev's *Revenge*

appreciate in its "sheer mesmeric rhythm... hypnotic rather than monotonous".

Andrews's comparisons are good ones, although the name springing most strongly to mind is Luis Buñuel – specifically his sexually overheated Mexican melodramas *Susana* (1951) and *The Brute* (1953). The brute in this case is tobacco farmer Osman (Erol Tas), who decides to dam the spring that originates on his land but irrigates the entire village, while also devising a means of seducing his sister-in-law Bahar (Hülya Kocyigit), despite her devotion to his younger, better-looking brother Hasan (Ulvi Dogan). Despite an obviously post-synched soundtrack and decidedly declamatory performances, Erksan whips up this overheated material to an impressively intense level, with plenty of memorably Buñuelian touches along the way, including a headscarfed scarecrow, the udders of a cow and oral extraction of snake venom.

*Trances* began life as a concert film about the band Nass El Ghiwane (whose hypnotic rhythms, entirely achieved with traditional instruments, had already made a huge impact on Moroccan youth) but developed into something resembling a fly-on-the-wall documentary (although much of it was in fact staged). The band are shown constructing their unique sound through rehearsal and interacting with

their audience on the streets – this is very much a two-way process – while director Ahmed El Maanouni also draws parallels between their art and Moroccan history both ancient and recent.

*Revenge* offers yet more variety, this time in the form of a poetic allegory spanning more than one century, although much of it takes place in the first half of the 20th, against the backdrop of Kazakhstan's Stalin-'cleansed' Korean community, uprooted in their thousands from Eastern Russia. Sungu (Alexandre Pan) would rather be a poet, but he has been specifically bred (and thereby cursed) to avenge his stepsister's death, a calling so fundamental to his very existence that it affects his every act (including, in one leg-crossingly painful scene, his first sexual experience), even though he's acutely aware of the pointlessness of his mission.

As one would expect from the track records of everyone involved in these discs, presentation standards are flawless. All restorations were sourced from the original camera negatives, with either the producer or director being actively involved, and each transfer captures the texture of the original image (high-contrast 35mm black-and-white for *Dry Summer*, grainy 16mm colour for *Trances*, the marked stylistic shifts of *Revenge*) as well as the content. Scorsese personally introduces each disc, while the 80-page booklet includes valuably context-setting essays by Phil Coldiron, Bilge Ebiri and Kent Jones. Above all, projects like this make us realise how narrow our definition of 'world cinema' typically is – even a comparatively adventurous label like Eureka has rarely ventured outside Europe, North America and Japan until now. 📺

*Projects like this make us realise how narrow our definition of 'world cinema' typically is*

# New releases

by Rudolf Klein-Rogge, who had worked with Lang several times but had recently been divorced from *Mabuse's* screenwriter Thea von Harbou. She had in fact long been involved with Lang, and they married in the year of *Mabuse's* release, following his first wife's suicide. Norwegian actress Aud Egede-Nissen plays the nightclub dancer who loves Mabuse and, in his service, seduces a millionaire played by one Paul Richter, whom she would later marry. Bernhard Goetzke, later to star in a lost film by Lang-devotee Hitchcock, *The Mountain Eagle*, is the incorruptible copper on Mabuse's trail.

As relentless in pace as a Bourne thriller yet with the narcotised plot development of a classic noir, *Mabuse* folds its social critique within a cloak of cinematic thrills, but it's a rare viewer who won't sense the chill here. And anyone hooked by Lang's mastery of the 90-minute Hollywood genre picture would do well to revisit the elaborate designs of his wild Weimar years.

**Disc:** This is an HD transfer of the 2k restoration previously seen on Eureka's DVD release. From that disc we also have three featurettes and David Kalat's superbly erudite commentary, plus a booklet of stills and Lang's pronouncements on the film.

## GASLIGHT

Thorold Dickinson; UK 1940; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format/Certificate PG; 85 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: short films 'Spanish ABC' and 'Behind the Spanish Lines' (1938, Thorold Dickinson and Sidney Cole), 'Westward Ho!', 'Yesterday Is Over Your Shoulder' (1940, Thorold Dickinson), 'Miss Grant Goes to the Door' (1940, Brian Desmond Hurst, from a story by Thorold Dickinson), original promotional materials and documents from BFI National Archive Special Collections, illustrated essay booklet

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

One of the ironies of Thorold Dickinson's blighted career was that neither of his great movies was originally destined for him. He was a last-minute choice for this chilling, consummately claustrophobic melodrama, after the rather better qualified Anthony Asquith dropped out (the masterly *The Queen of Spades*, once again with Anton Walbrook, also took him off the subs' bench when Rodney Ackland was sent off by Anatole de Grunwald). Despite only having three weeks to prep *Gaslight*, he put his stamp on it, filling the film with the Victorian patriarchal attitudes and genteel clutter through which Diana Wynyard's spooked wife peers longingly at the outside world.

As fan Martin Scorsese has noted, this taut film has a far darker, more atmospheric tone than the Cukor remake, with tight-laced tinges of sexuality and desire and a sharp eye for glancing class cruelties ("Only two maids" is a neighbour's delicious snub). As well as the thoughtful framing and camera movements, which heighten the tension of Walbrook's cat-and-mouse abuse, the film is full of gothic grace notes – a skein of embroidery silk used to strangle its user, a Punch and Judy show battering a helpless wooden wife. When Walbrook's autocratic swindler forces his wife and female servants to kneel and kiss the family bible placed before him, the scene shudders with a refined perversity. Much of the film's pervasive menace is down to Walbrook's

superb portrayal, which takes the form of one knowing performance wrapped smoothly in another. Under the cold cruelty in the name of 'correctness', a damped-down delight in his tormenting japes peeps out delicately via an arched eyebrow or the curl of a lip. Dickinson's camera is fascinated by this peek-a-boo villainy, best expressed in a startling close-up where Walbrook's weary hand-to-face gesture suddenly reveals an eye gleeful with malice.

**Disc:** Deftly digitally remastered, this is a lovely pearly transfer that allows the film's textures to be fully appreciated (Wynyard's fussy, hobbling wardrobe in particular). It is accompanied by a comprehensive selection of Dickinson's skilful if earnest pro-Spanish Republican or WWII propaganda shorts, of which his bustling paean to evacuees *Westward Ho!* is probably the pick of the bunch. Best of all is the really first-class essay booklet, in which Henry K. Miller mulls over *Gaslight's* genesis and Iain Sinclair's spiky overview of the life of author Patrick Hamilton reads like a short story.

## FILMS BY TOBE HOOPER

### LIFEFORCE

USA 1985; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 116 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: audio commentaries with Tobe Hooper, Bill Moseley, Caroline Williams and Torn Savini, 'It Runs in the Family' documentary, interviews with members of cast and crew, alternate opening sequence, deleted scenes, 'Still Feelin' the Buzz', interview with horror expert Stephen Thrower, original trailer, 'The Heisters', 'Eggshells' with audio commentary by Hooper, conversation with Hooper, trailer reel, 100-page booklet

### THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE 2

USA 1986; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 96 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentaries (with Tobe Hooper, effects artist Douglas Smith, makeup effects artist

Nick Maley), 'Cannon Fodder: The Making of Life Force', 'Space Vampires in London: an interview with Tobe Hooper', 'Dangerous Beauty: an interview with Mathilda May', 'Carlsen's Curse', original theatrical trailer, booklet

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

In the 1980s, Tobe Hooper signed up with Cannon Films and made two healthily budgeted, effects-heavy science-fiction films that underperformed at the box office. He then made a sequel to his groundbreaking *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, which similarly didn't catch on. These lavish special editions of Hooper's key Cannon titles – missing in action is his remake of *Invaders from Mars* – allow a fresh appreciation of the qualities they do have rather than dwelling on those they lack. The inclusion as an extra on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* of Hooper's pre-*Chain Saw* underground feature *Eggshells* (and gothic comedy short *The Heisters*) might prompt a reassessment of his entire filmography.

*Life Force*, based on Colin Wilson's novel *The Space Vampires*, opens with a mission led by astronaut Steve Railsback (a leading man who seems almost an afterthought in a film that doesn't need or want a hero) discovering an alien craft hidden in the tail of Halley's Comet... and we then follow a naked alien humanoid (Mathilda May) as she stalks around London creating a race of vampire-zombies while various boffins and officials try to work out what's happening. It's clumsy storytelling, with major characters who aren't properly introduced or despatched and swathes of plot taking place off screen even in the longer, preferred cut. It has strong, strange sequences, with an array of mostly British character actors (Peter Firth, Frank Finlay, Michael Gothard, Patrick Stewart, Aubrey Morris) doing what they can with absurd material, and the 80s-style effects sequences hold up well. Like most



**Life Force** It has moments that linger in the memory – often those built around the sheer presence of Mathilda May as a voluptuous alien



Cannon prestige productions, it seems to have been made and remade too many times to be a coherent, satisfying whole, but moments – often those built around the sheer presence of May as the voluptuous alien – linger in the memory.

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* joins *Evil Dead 2* and *Gremlins 2: The New Batch* in the roster of late 80s/early 90s sequels that are essentially parodies of the films they purport to be following up. It reruns a great deal of the first film, but tips it towards grotesque humour and farce in a way that undercuts the fearsomeness of its cannibal family. Here, Leatherface falls in love with a disc jockey (Caroline Williams) but suffers a sexual dysfunction when his chainsaw won't rev up.

Among the extras on this release are grainy, video work-print versions of graphic Tom Savini gore effects that wound up not being in the movie – to the disappointment of horror fans who were expecting something to compound rather than undermine the apocalyptic terror of *Chain Saw*. With committed work from Dennis Hopper as an implacable Texas Ranger on the trail of the mad family, who have become wealthy thanks to a chilli recipe and now live in a carnival, this plays better than *Lifeorce*, though still doesn't quite feel finished.

*Eggshells*, made in Austin in 1969, is an impressionist portrait of the times, loosely following a small group of young counterculture types who share a perhaps haunted house. It includes *vérité* footage of a Vietnam demo and an open-air wedding, and credible rambles as the kids earnestly talk politics or gossip. But Hooper also includes fantastical elements, like a wall that paints itself, a ghost weaving through the crowds, some pixellated tours of Austin and a strange machine that – prefiguring the cannibal family – processes young folk into red sludge. It's a wistful, witty, anarchic effort, but shows a Tobe Hooper with a utopian streak that tended to be obscured by the gigs he could land after his breakthrough with *Chain Saw*. Partnering it with the *Chainsaw* sequel underlines the way Hooper works with actors – such as Jim Siedow and Bill Moseley – who can keep up a stream of patter, slipping in telling lines and details to illuminate a wayward storyline.

**Disc:** Arrow's Blu-rays are packaged with feature-length retrospective making-of documentaries (sometimes very tactful – a British crewman puts *Lifeorce*'s erratic storytelling down to Hooper's overconsumption of strong coffee), additional interviews with participants, deleted scenes (*Lifeorce* is presented in two variant cuts) and much associated material.

## LE JOLI MAI

Chris Marker/Pierre Lhomme; France 1962; Arte Editions/Region-free NTSC DVD; 136 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: 'Jouer à Paris' (Catherine Varlin, 1962), 'D'un lointain regard' (Jean Ravel, 1964), sequence cut from release version, 'Exercice de cinéma direct' (TV report with commentary by Pierre Lhomme)

### Reviewed by David Thompson

Not May 68 but May 62, another notable date in French history, since it was, as the commentary of this remarkable documentary (English title: *The Lovely Month of May*) tells us, regarded as "the first spring of peace". For this was just after the Evian



Shady goings-on: *Gaslight*

Accords, when a ceasefire had been agreed in the French colony of Algeria and approved through referendum by a huge majority. Although the troubles would continue in this period, it was a key moment in the birth of a modern France, and one that Chris Marker felt should be acknowledged by an expansive enquiry into the lives of Parisians, their hopes and dreams.

Only two years before, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin had made their pioneering social documentary set in the city, *Chronicle of a Summer*, employing the new lightweight camera and sound equipment developed in the movement labelled 'cinéma direct' in the US and Canada. But while Rouch and Morin had focused on a handful of individuals, exploring their lives to the point of psychodrama while creating a self-reflexive structure, Marker's approach was more quietly observational and poetic in inclination, as well as more politically engaged.

Divided into two parts, entitled 'Prayer on the Eiffel Tower' and 'The Return of Fantômas', *Le Joli mai* includes voiceovers to set up subjects (beginning with the question, "Is this the most beautiful city in the world?") but mainly allows the people to speak at length for themselves, prompted by discreet questions posed by Marker himself. Superbly shot by the future great cinematographer Pierre Lhomme (to whom Marker generously gave co-directorial credit), the film is replete with visual epiphanies and moving moments, as well as much wry humour – a tailor is recommended to go to see *Last Year in Marienbad* but he doesn't see the point of paying money to have to figure things out! The interviewees include a young couple who touchingly believe in everlasting love (he is about to go off to Algeria), a priest who has become a worker and militant communist, a young Algerian harassed by the police, and a mother of eight, thrilled that she can move from the slums to a new tower block. For this is also a vision of a changing Paris,

one marked by the shadow of the Algerian conflict (many details of which will be obscure to non-French viewers) and succumbing to the temptations of global consumerism.

Even when encountering blithe ignorance among some of his subjects, Marker's passionate enquiry into the politics of life never wavers for a moment, woven as it is into a film of immense grace, generosity and wisdom.

**Disc:** Supervised by Pierre Lhomme, this is a fine (but not over-scrubbed) digital restoration, with the material more recently cut on Marker's request (17 minutes of footage, mostly relating to Algeria) included as an extra. The shorts derive from material not used in the feature, and are enchanting in their own way. Though not clearly stated in the packaging, all the films included carry English subtitles, with the choice of the narration in French (by Yves Montand) or in English (by Simone Signoret). The booklet, however, is only in French.

## THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER

Charles Laughton; USA 1955; Arrow Academy/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 1.66:1; Features: 'Laughton Directs' documentary, interview with Stanley Cortez, music and SFX soundtrack, trailer, booklet with writing by David Thompson, Gavin Lambert and F.X. Feery

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Two myths have trailed *The Night of the Hunter* ever since it gained critical acclaim in the 1960s. First, that when credited screenwriter James Agee, alcoholic and ill, turned in a huge unusable screenplay, the script was largely written by Charles Laughton. Second, that Laughton disliked his two child actors, Billy Chapin and Sally Jane Bruce, and refused to have anything to do with them, leaving his lead actor Robert Mitchum to direct them. The first of these stories was put about by the film's producer, Paul Gregory, the second by Mitchum himself.

Both, as recent discoveries have proved, were untrue. As Jeffrey Couchman noted in his dedicated account *The Night of the Hunter: A Biography of a Film*, when Agee's script showed up, it was clear that Laughton had radically shortened it but in no way junked it. And the find of eight hours of outtakes revealed Laughton patiently directing and guiding the children through their scenes. It's these outtakes that form the basis of the absorbing two-and-a-half-hour documentary, *Charles Laughton Directs*, which accompanies this release.

*Hunter*'s unenthused reception deterred Laughton from ever directing again – on all the evidence, a major loss. Dismissed on its release as old-fashioned, melodramatic and laughable, it now looks like a poetic, visionary classic of Southern gothic, graced with Mitchum's finest performance as Preacher Harry Powell, at once sinister, charming and slyly comic. As indeed is the whole film – its idiosyncratic fluidity of tone may have been what alienated those initial audiences. What's so disconcerting about it, Charles Baxter suggested in *Writers at the Movies*, "is its combination of naïveté and knowingness... Viewers find themselves either loving or hating its mixture of horror, visual poetry and comedy."

In its tone and visual stylisation, *Hunter* channels the silent cinema of Murnau

## Revival

## THE ALL-AMERICAN EYE

John Ford is best known as a director of westerns – but a new DVD collection reminds us that he was so much more than that

### JOHN FORD: THE COLUMBIA FILMS COLLECTION

THE WHOLE TOWN'S TALKING/THE LONG GRAY LINE/GIDEON'S DAY/THE LAST HURRAH/TWO RODE TOGETHER

USA 1935/55/58/58/61; TCM Vault Collection/Region 1 DVD; 93/138/100/121/109 minutes; 1.37:1/2.55:1/1.85:1/1.85:1/1.85:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

There's only one western in this five-disc collection of films that John 'I make westerns' Ford made for Columbia, but it's a doozy.

*Two Rode Together* (1961), starring James Stewart and Richard Widmark, is justly famed for the easy interplay of its leads, as seen in a deceptively simple four-minute shot that showcases Stewart's warbling circumlocution and Widmark's wry reactions. It's also a companion piece of sorts to *The Searchers* (1956), for it likewise deals with the retrieval of whites taken captive in Comanche raids while focusing even more explicitly on the race-hate among the supposedly civilised. What lingers in the mind here is the wounded face of Linda Cristal, formerly the hostage wife of a Comanche, shunned by the guests at an officer's ball upon her homecoming, or the lynch-mob murder of a teenaged boy raised among Comanches shortly after he's returned to his own people.

While not generally shortlisted among Ford's major works, *Two Rode Together* is a great late film – and an important chapter in the director's ongoing questioning and deconstruction of the western mythology that he had been fundamental in shaping.

Elsewhere in the set, which has been created through a collaboration between Columbia, Turner Classic Movies and The Film Foundation, there are John Ford pictures that don't fit the generally understood John Ford template at all. Ford's first film for Columbia, made when he was on loan from his longtime home at 20th Century Fox, is an urban comedy, *The Whole Town's Talking* (1935). It's a vehicle for Edward G. Robinson, who plays the double role of Arthur Jones, a meek poetaster who pines after Jean Arthur from an adjacent desk at their office job, and also the escaped con who's Arthur's spitting image, doing his best Little Caesar.

*The Last Hurrah* (1958) is also set in an urban milieu, a New England city clearly modelled after Boston. Spencer Tracy is on superb form as Frank Skeffington, the city's genial Irish-American mayor, who's running for a fifth term with an old-fashioned, backslapping, door-to-door approach, against an upstart for whom the Yankee Wasp powers-that-be are funding a TV campaign. It's obvious that Tracy



John Ford on the set of *Gideon's Day*

and Ford are invested in the material, two of Hollywood's consummate professionals, both Celts, dignifying the final run of a rough, uncompromised man of the old school.


While Ford prided himself on his ability to take on any job, it must be said that *Gideon's Day* (1958) feels like a mismatch between director and material. The film is a London-shot adaptation of John Creasey's police procedural, following Jack Hawkins's Scotland Yard detective through one exceptionally busy day. While Ford could apply his particular self-critical brand of sentimentality in environs where he had some emotional stake – with Irish and American subjects, say – *Gideon's* is on the wrong foot from the opening fanfare of 'London Bridge Is Falling Down'.

By contrast, the other major film in TCM Vault's collection aside from *Two Rode Together*

*Ford was conservative and liberal, bellicose and peace-loving, a woman-hater with a deep tenderness for women*

is based on a property that refers distinctly to the Irish-American experience – Tipperary-born Martin Maher's memoir of 50 years' service at the West Point Military Academy. Ford shot Maher's book as *The Long Gray Line* (1955), his first film in grudgingly adopted CinemaScope, which he nevertheless found good for photographing regimental marches and views of the Hudson River. The part of Maher was played by Tyrone Power, an actor whose abilities far transcended the swashbuckling roles he's mostly remembered for.

Ford's homage to West Point exhibits a reverence for fealty to the martial tradition that's undercut by a healthy scepticism, as in *Fort Apache* (1948). *The Long Gray Line* is a film about war in which not a single shot is fired, though the loss of life is more heavily felt than in many a picture that focuses explicitly on battlefield carnage. Perhaps the most heartbreaking scene, however, involves the newly widowed Maher fixing himself a bachelor's omelette on Christmas Eve, when well-wishers – students, graduates, old friends – slowly begin to fill his empty home. As at the conclusion of *The Last Hurrah*, in which the ailing Skeffington's constituents line up to pay him tribute, a lifetime of duty reaps its due honours.

Ford is one of the greatest filmmakers the US ever produced, and one of the greatest directors in the American grain, for he was big enough to take everything in, the four corners of the country, the whole panorama, contradictions and all. He was conservative and liberal, nostalgic and experimental, bellicose and peace-loving, a woman-hater with a deep tenderness for women, hard-bitten and soft-hearted. The Columbia Films Collection is therefore a boon, for it gives fresh evidence that the man who made westerns, John Ford, is still larger than we thought. He contains multitudes. 



Late great Ford: *Two Rode Together*, starring James Stewart



# New releases

and D.W. Griffith – a link Laughton makes explicit with his casting of Griffith's favourite actress, Lillian Gish, as the fairy godmother with whom the children, fleeing from Powell, find refuge. Two nocturnal scenes – for this is a film of expressionist shadows – encapsulate the haunted, fairytale mood. As the fugitive children drift down the river, they're watched from the banks by animals seen in huge close-up, like tutelary spirits. And when Gish, sitting on her porch guarding the house, her shotgun across her lap, starts singing 'Leaning on the Everlasting Arms', the preacher, prowling outside in the dark, joins in – good and evil in deceptive harmony.

**Disc:** A flawless restoration, capturing DP Stanley Cortez's cinematography in all its subtlety. Besides the documentary, there's a 1984 interview with Cortez and a trailer, but the rest of the lavish extras that garnished the Criterion release are absent. Links to the extras are in tiny, cramped capitals, making them hard to decipher.

## NOSFERATU

FW. Murnau; Germany 1922; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 93 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.33:1; Features: commentaries by David Kalat, Brad Stevens and R. Dixon Smith, documentary ('The Language of Shadows'), interviews (Abel Ferrara, Kevin Jackson), booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

FW. Murnau and Albin Grau's notoriously unauthorised adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* wasn't the first horror film, or even the first great horror film (*The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* had a two-year start), but it's the first great modern horror film, in which the bats (and rats) lurking in Transylvanian belfries are unleashed into society as a by-product of a greedy estate agency's desire for a lucrative property transaction – a metaphor that extended into the real world when Stoker's widow successfully sued for infringement of her property. Had she succeeded in suppressing the film, making it vanish as thoroughly as most of Murnau's previous efforts, she'd have dammed what became one of the horror genre's most nourishing wellsprings – we'd never have known, of course, but the list of films that would have looked and felt inescapably different would fill a hefty volume.

'Cadaverous' is often a tasteless euphemism for unnaturally thin, but in this case it's a literal description of the effect of Max Schreck's performance as Count Orlok/Dracula, one so iconic that it's developed its own mythology (to the extent that it's somewhat unnerving to see Schreck the actor pop up in other German films of the period, including Murnau's later *The Finances of the Grand Duke*). If it came to a ruck between Orlok and Bela Lugosi's far more effete Dracula a few years later, there wouldn't be much doubt about the winner.

**Disc:** Masters of Cinema's already comprehensive DVD has been impressively upgraded in nearly all aspects for this Blu-ray. The sparkling new high-definition transfer of Luciano Berriatúa's mid-2000s restoration, tinted and toned and with original German intertitles (plus optional English subtitles) should delight everyone but Florence Stoker's ghost, and the reconstruction of Hans Erdmann's orchestral score is thunderously



**Creature comfort: *The White Dove***

vivid. The old disc's extras have been retained, augmented here by two interviews with BFI Film Classics author Kevin Jackson and *The Addiction* director Abel Ferrara, plus a typically rumbustious commentary by Murnau/Lang specialist David Kalat. Only the booklet is slightly slimmed down, though it still weighs in at a hefty 56-pages, with archival and more recent contributions from Albin Grau, Craig Keller, Enno Patalas and Gilberto Perez. For those locked to Region A, Kino recently released a Blu-ray of the same restoration, offering a choice of German or English intertitles/onscreen text, but with much slimmer contextual pickings.

## THE UNINVITED

Lewis Allen; USA 1944; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 99 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: visual essay by filmmaker Michael Almereyda, two radio adaptations starring Ray Milland, trailer, booklet of essays and interviews

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

*The Uninvited* was, famously, Hollywood's first authentic ghost story. It's a slick, romantic, sometimes even campy potboiler that, in its most crystalline genre moments, still delivers an irresistible darkness-at-the-bottom-of-the-stairs frisson. However glib the film gets, the sound of sobbing in the darkness runs up the back of your neck on little clawed feet.

Ray Milland and Ruth Hussey star as an oddly coupled brother and sister who decide to buy a haunted Cornwall-cliffside mansion. The resident moaners and weepers therein compel them to get involved with local secrets, namely Gail Russell, a haunted village lass standing astride a backstory of possession and murder.

Because it's the first, and because it was still wartime, Lewis Allen's film can't hope to chin up against movies from more than 15 years later, such as *The Innocents* (1961) or *The Haunting* (1963). But it's an expert launch of pulp all the same, burned into the psyche of moviegoers of the day, and fuelled by Milland's particular brand of secretive cynicism and by Russell, whose fragile, haunted demeanour serves the context in unforgettable ways. To learn about her subsequent alcoholism and jittery ruin is to feel a real Hollywood ghost story in your bones.

**Disc:** Typically Criterionically beautiful. Michael Almereyda's provocative and inventive doc-essay is a prize all its own, free-associatively limning the symbolic thrust of Russell's persona,

the lesbian subtext provided by authoress/screenwriter Cornelia Otis Skinner in the dragon-lady supporting role as the ghost's surviving 'great friend', and most of all the uneasy, suspicious character of Milland and the intersections *The Uninvited* has with his other pictures, in particular Lang's *Ministry of Fear* (1944), which in Michael Almereyda's re-editing is a ghost-story dream-film unto itself.

## THE WHITE DOVE/JOSEF KILIAN

Frantisek Vlácil/Jan Schmidt and Pavel Juráček; Czechoslovakia 1960/63; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; 67/37 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.37:1; Features: booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Paired more for unconventional length than for common thematic ground, this fascinating double bill nonetheless sheds valuable light on the pre-history of the Czechoslovak New Wave. Frantisek Vlácil never considered himself part of the movement, but his debut feature *The White Dove* showed a similar prioritising of poetry over prose, image over text, music (by the great Zdenek Liska) over dialogue. Narratively, it's superficially similar to *Kes* (made nine years later), in that it's about a lonely boy, Misa, who befriends an off-course racing pigeon accidentally shot down in Prague mid-journey. But unlike Ken Loach, Vlácil minimises social commentary – instead, the pigeon and his temporary master become models for the boy's neighbour Martin, a painter and sculptor.

Vlácil's distinctively graphic approach permeates every frame. The Baltic location, where the pigeon's owner Suzanne awaits the bird's arrival, is horizontal and open, an infinite expanse of sand and water, while Misa's urban environment is vertical and claustrophobic, comprising metal and glass boxes, wire fences and lift shafts (the latter the setting for a thrilling confrontation between the pigeon and a black cat named Satan). Even at this early stage, Vlácil's eye for a striking image was fully developed, turning a detail like a tiny spot of paint blooming after reacting with water into something strangely spellbinding.

Although not adapted from Kafka, almost every frame of Jan Schmidt and Pavel Juráček's *Josef Kilian* is imbued with his spirit, notably the *trompe l'oeil* shot in which the impression of a deserted, apparently nocturnal street is subverted by the emergence of a line of schoolchildren, unsettlingly illuminated by a previously invisible shaft of sunlight. This sets the off-kilter tone for a scenario in which a man rents a cat as a companion for the evening, a notion presented as not merely plausible but rather appealing. But in attempting to return the cat the next day, he finds that the shop from which he rented it has vanished, leading to an increasingly bureaucratic nightmare whose oppressiveness is mockingly intensified by what are still highly recognisable Prague locations.

**Disc:** *Josef Kilian* looks terrific for its age. However, although *The White Dove* advances substantially on Facets' horrible DVD (the only other English-friendly edition), it was clearly and unavoidably sourced from analogue videotape. The booklet is crammed with useful analysis and context by Czech cinema expert Peter Hames. **S**

# Television

## BROADCHURCH

Kudos/Imaginary Friends/ITV; UK 2013; Acorn Media/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 426 minutes; 16:9; Features: audio commentaries, behind-the-scenes featurette, deleted scenes, stills gallery

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

Despite competing among a glut of TV serials about missing children – including *Mayday*, *Top of the Lake* and *The Guilty* – this eight-parter by writer-producer Chris Chibnall clearly won the popular vote. Opening with a literal cliffhanger, it's a whodunnit truly unafraid of the cliché, ticking pretty much every box in the police-procedural playbook: skeletons tumble out of assorted cupboards as a small community is ripped apart by a heinous crime; a female police officer is passed over for promotion and finds it hard to work with her new boss, a saturnine outsider who is carrying several guilty secrets of his own (respectively played by that ubiquitous pair, Olivia Colman and David Tennant); the tabloids descend and make things worse; innocents are accused and mob hysteria strikes; and then the least likely suspect is revealed as the culprit.

Beautiful to look at and bolstered by a star-studded cast, the show is undeniably smart, deftly parcelling out crucial narrative and character nuggets at regular intervals and wisely opting to show its hand early in the concluding instalment when revealing the murderer, in order to concentrate less on plot mechanics and more on the impact of the revelation.

In essence a supercharged Francis Durbridge mystery updated for the Sarah Lund era (with a dash of Thomas Hardy added for literary ballast), this old-fashioned serial suffers from a surfeit of red herrings (and it's about one episode too long really) but also lets itself down by having its lone black actor, in an otherwise all-white cast, play a ne'er-do-well with connections to the local drug trade.

**Disc:** This immaculate high-definition edition makes the Dorset locations look even more impressive, and by way of extras offers two audio commentaries (one with Tennant, the other with Colman) and half an hour of deleted scenes that serve only to disentangle some minor subplots.

## A DIFFERENT WORLD/ MESSENGER FROM POLAND

DNA Poland/WNET New York/Norddeutscher Rundfunk Hamburg/Channel 4; UK 1987; Panamint Cinema/Region 0 DVD; Certificate E; 98 minutes; 4:3; Features: 16-page booklet

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

This release brings together two programmes made for the nine-part documentary *The Struggles for Poland*. The third episode, *A Different World*, proved controversial for its depiction of anti-Semitism before and during World War II and drew complaints from sections of the Polish community. The controversy may have had a long-term impact, since the series has never been repeated here on terrestrial TV and hasn't been released for home viewing until now.

A stirring evocation of a lost people, it seamlessly stitches together historical footage and interviews with Holocaust survivors, with a guiding narrative (spoken by Susannah York)



**Broadchurch** In essence a supercharged Francis Durbridge mystery updated for the Sarah Lund era, with a dash of Thomas Hardy for literary ballast

that offers a complex picture and eschews pat answers. The lack of any music score or dramatic recreations comes as an enormous relief given the already emotional subject matter.

The film is accompanied by *Messenger from Poland*, a 40-minute interview with Jan Karski, who ferried information in and out of Poland throughout the conflict. Originally filmed in 1985 as part of the pilot for the series, it was spun off into its own broadcast.

**Disc:** The image quality is inevitably variable but perfectly acceptable. The only extra is a detailed 16-page booklet compiled by producer Martin Smith.

## WONDERFALLS

Regency/Living Dead Guy/Fox; USA 2004; Mediumare/Region 2 DVD; 577 minutes; Certificate 12; 16:9; Features: 'Welcome to Wonderfalls' retrospective documentary, visual effects featurette, audio commentaries

**Reviewed by Sergio Angelini**

This short-lived Delphic comedy-drama stars Caroline Dhavernas as Jaye, a 24-year-old college graduate living in the High and Dry trailer park and slumming behind the counter at a Niagara Falls gift store. On the day she is passed over for promotion she succumbs to 'Joan of Arc syndrome', with assorted toy animals starting to

give her life advice. Shaken from her disaffected pose, she tentatively tries to reconnect with her laidback brother and high-powered, deeply closeted sister, as well as her well-meaning but overbearing parents ("Sweetheart, when was the last time you had an orgasm?"). Trouble is she's not mad, because the cryptic messages from her muses are genuinely helpful, though frustratingly she seems to be able to help everyone but herself ("We're all fate's bitch. You might as well go ahead and bend over for destiny now"). And then she meets down-on-his-luck bartender Eric (Tyron Leitso) but is told to help him reconcile with his unfaithful wife.

An unpredictable show with a warm and sweet centre, it was cancelled with unseemly haste but at least managed to tie up all its loose ends for the finale.

**Disc:** The image is a little bit grainy but generally pleasing, as is the new 5.1 audio mix, which smoothly accommodates several music substitutions. The retrospective featurette and six audio commentaries find the main cast and crew in high spirits as they reminisce about the little show that almost made it, bringing in many abstruse factoids (like why lesbians apparently prefer shorter fingernails) along with more standard production info. **S**



# Read



## THE FILM FESTIVAL READER

Edited by Dina Iordanova, St Andrews Film Studies, 250pp, hardback, £39.99, ISBN 9781908437099

What is the importance of film festivals in the context of film culture at large? What logic reigns within the film festival galaxy? Are film festivals tools of power and prestige that make or break the fate of a film? Or do they effectively seal off diverse and unique cinema from the wider public while simultaneously professing to celebrate it? What are the key features and who are the key stakeholders of film festivals? What, if anything, is wrong with the concept of 'festival films'? What makes a good film festival 'good' or a bad one 'bad'? These and other questions are raised and treated in the classic texts included in this anthology.

[www.stafs.org](http://www.stafs.org)



## GLOBAL MEXICAN CINEMA

### Its Golden Age

By Robert McKee Irwin and Maricruz Castro Ricalde, BFI Publishing/Palgrave Macmillan, 240pp, £22.99, ISBN 9781844575329

The golden age of Mexican cinema, which spanned the 1930s through to the 1950s, saw Mexico's film industry become one of the most productive in the world, exercising a decisive influence on national culture and identity. This book explores the global reception and impact of Mexican golden-age cinema, and explains the key aspects of its international success, from its role in forming a nostalgic cultural landscape for Mexican emigrants working in the United States, to its economic and cultural influence on Latin America, Spain and Yugoslavia. The authors reveal how its film industry helped establish Mexico as a longstanding centre of cultural influence for the Spanish-speaking world and beyond.

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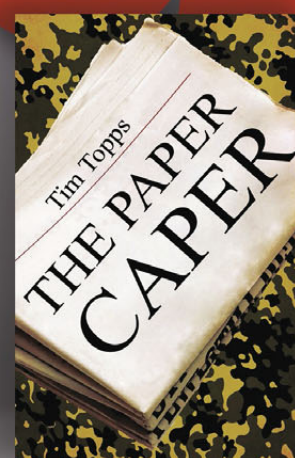
## LE JOUR SE LÈVE

### French Film Guide

By Ben McCann, I.B. Tauris, 136pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781780765921

*Le jour se lève* (1939), directed by Marcel Carné, is widely recognised as the classic French poetic realist film. Told in flashback, it recounts the story of a man who has committed a murder, and who awaits his fate as the police close in. Ben McCann's perceptive and lively book traces the evolution of *Le jour se lève* and situates it in a very specific historical moment. He also underlines the importance of actors Jules Berry and Arletty, production designer Alexandre Trauner, writer Jacques Prévert, and cinematographer Curt Courant in establishing the film's tone, mood and visual style. McCann charts the national and international reception of the film, uncovering a work that deeply divided critics at a time of national crisis.

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## THE PAPER CAPER

By Tim Topps, Matador Books, 200pp, Ebook, £3.99, ISBN 9781783067749

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Sleight of hand: Wes Anderson has spoken openly of the way his relationship to film history informs his work

## A MAN UNDER THE INFLUENCE

### THE WES ANDERSON COLLECTION

Matt Zoller Seitz with introduction by Michael Chabon, Abrams, 336pp, \$40, ISBN 9780810997417

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Let's state the obvious first: *The Wes Anderson Collection* is a big, lavish, gorgeous, colourful conversation piece. Its publisher, Abrams, specialises in art books and illustrated books for children and its *Collection*, in sheer physical heft, can hold its own against Taschen's attempts to further monetise name-brand auteurs of the arthouse golden age, or the latest endeavour of the Kubrick Estate, Inc. Yet this book, a labour of love by current [rogerebert.com](http://rogerebert.com) editor-in-chief and tirelessly

gigging critic Matt Zoller Seitz, is dedicated to a still-working filmmaker who is only in his mid-40s and has to date released seven feature films, with an eighth on the horizon.

The *Collection* is divided into chronological discussion of each of Anderson's films; as he continues to build more and bigger dollhouses, one can imagine the book growing accordingly. Seitz notes that this version was itself nearly 20 years in the making: both he and Anderson are native Texans, roughly similar in age, and Seitz has followed Anderson's career since his first short film *Bottle Rocket* (1994) – later expanded for his feature debut – screened in Dallas.

A demotic and direct writer, Seitz takes an approach that is equal parts analytical and outreach-educational. In taking Anderson as his subject, Seitz has a unique opportunity, for Anderson is one of the few certifiable crossover phenomena to come out of the American indie scene. He has succeeded in carrying his

thematic preoccupations and refined personal aesthetic from no-budget shoots into ever more ambitious acts of world-building that feature snowballing all-star ensemble casts, while speaking openly of the manner in which his touching relationship to film history informs his work. Seitz embroiders a discursive primer in film history, as seen through the prism of Wes Anderson movies, on nearly every page, illustrations and captions identifying subjects from Orson Welles to the French New Wave to Satyajit Ray as they come up in conversation.

These references are part of a larger attempt to catalogue the various fetish items and figures whose influences run through Anderson's filmography; the stated concept behind the book, reflected in the title, is that Anderson is as defined by his possessions as his characters are. Names checked include usual suspects such as J.D. Salinger, Charles Schulz and Jacques-Yves Cousteau, as well as less apparent



but still prominent influences, such as Barry Braverman's 1978 short *The Murita Cycles* or the Bronzino and Hans Holbein paintings hanging in New York City's Frick Collection, which provided the palette for *Rushmore* (1998).

The book is itself an extravagant gallery, incorporating on-set stills by Laura Wilson, mother of Anderson collaborators Owen and Luke and a photographer in her own right, as well as storyboards, production sketches and breakdowns of montages (Max Fischer's extracurricular activities, Margot Tenenbaum's indiscretions) and sequence shots (the "Let me tell you about my boat" shot from *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* in 2004, the 'Dream Train' sequence from *The Darjeeling Limited* in 2007). The colourful illustrations, by Max Dalton in a crepe-paper cut-out style reminiscent of Miroslav Šašek's work, lend the thing the quality of a children's book, and there is a sense that Seitz is taking a cue from the pedagogical intention of Benjamin Britten and Leonard Bernstein's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, which features prominently in 2012's *Moonrise Kingdom*, creating his own young person's guide to the cinema.

Appearances aside, *The Wes Anderson Collection* isn't exactly kid's stuff. The bulk of the text is made up of five interviews conducted between 2010 and 2012, full of detailed, probing questions. Anderson is not always the most eloquent explicator of his own art, however, and this is reflected in the text, which preserves his non-

*Anderson has carried his refined personal aesthetic from no-budget shoots into ever more ambitious acts of world-building*

responses – "yeps" and "ahs" and "hmms" – to some of Seitz's more penetrating, long-form queries, which become a continuation by other means of the author's introductory essays to each chapter. From the essays and interviews a cohesive outline emerges of Anderson's worldview as reflected in his movies, in which micromanaging control freaks struggle with and ultimately accept the uncontrollable, a tension reflected in Anderson's collision of messy emotions and neat-as-a-pin *mise-en-scène*.

The checklist of influences-as-accessories might offer ammunition to Anderson's detractors, as does the coyly "gee-whiz" tone of the introduction by Michael Chabon, which appeared in a previous version in *The New York Review of Books*, and remains a little too reliant on received wisdom. But the very existence of *The Wes Anderson Collection* – such a handsome, inviting thing, speaking of an ambition to reintroduce loveliness to the too-often dry field of film books – should be cause for celebration among those for whom cinema is something other than a cabalistic, clandestine, niche affair. As someone with a deep respect for Anderson's work, I found it an enjoyable read, periodically illuminating. For someone with a budding interest in movies, though, this book could be life-changing. ☺

## CRAB MONSTERS, TEENAGE CAVEMEN, AND CANDY STRIPE NURSES

ROGER CORMAN: KING OF THE B MOVIE

By Chris Nashawaty, with an introduction by John Landis, Abrams, 272 pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781419706691

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

The career of Roger Corman has always been so lively and busy that it's difficult to encompass in a book told from a single viewpoint – even Corman's own autobiography *How I Made a Hundred Movies in Hollywood and Never Lost a Dime* (1998) includes *Rashomon*-like counterpoint anecdotes from many people who have worked with him over the years. It's also too good a story, or too rich a set of interlocking stories, to be told only once.

Just as the recent documentary *Corman's World: Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel* (2011) feels like an expanded remake of *Roger Corman: Hollywood's Wild Angel* (1978), this illustrated, anecdotal account of his career and filmography feels like a glossier remake of J. Philip di Franco's *The Movie World of Roger Corman* (1979) or Ed Naha's *The Films of Roger Corman: Brilliance on a Budget* (1982).

Chris Nashawaty is light on analysis, which means that he doesn't risk seeming foolish by claiming more for *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1958) than that (remarkable) little film can sustain, but he does provide essays contextualising and praising a selection of key Corman films as producer and director. Otherwise, this is a book that is organised rather than edited – no mean achievement, since this requires the selection of quotes from a dizzying array of Corman collaborators and Corman himself over six decades.

By default, the book follows the evolution of a brand of cinema – labelled, not unproblematically, the 'B movie' in its title – from the era of drive-in double bills of juvenile-delinquent or rubber-monster pictures to the SyFy Channel-backed likes of *Sharktopus* (2010).

As a director, Corman progressed from black-and-white double features in the 1950s, including such miniature classics as *A Bucket of Blood* (1958), through the classier achievements of the 1960s Vincent Price-starring Edgar Allan Poe cycle that began with *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1960), to a range of socially engaged yet scurrilous tabloid efforts,

including the liberal gothic integration drama *The Intruder* (1962) and the outlaw biker saga *The Wild Angels* (1966). Though Corman made the one-off *Frankenstein Unbound* in 1990, and Nashawaty notes his disappointment that this comeback wasn't on a larger scale, Corman's career as a director essentially concluded with the 1960s. In 1970, he founded New World, his own production outfit, and outsourced women-in-prison pictures to the Philippines, distributed Bergman and Truffaut films to drive-ins and gave early gigs to the likes of Martin Scorsese and Joe Dante.

With other companies – Concorde and New Horizons – Corman has stayed in the game, whether the outlet was a drive-in circuit, videocassette, DVD or cable television. Coming to the subject after a slew of other books, Nashawaty gets to tell sections of the story that bring it up to date – it's always a pleasure to hear new insights into the way AIP's crass producers were coaxed into backing the literary horrors of Poe or how a remarkable clutch of talents cobbled together the constantly mutating Boris Karloff vehicle *The Terror* (1963) – but this book also spends time on the lesser-known stretches of Corman's career, including a great many films by Jim Wynorski, who spent more time with hot-tub-dinosaur babes than Corman graduates like Francis Coppola, Ron Howard, Jack Nicholson, James Cameron or Peter Bogdanovich.

Beautifully designed, with a wealth of lurid poster-work, on-set photos and frame blow-ups, this is a hugely entertaining book. Jonathan Demme has noted how Corman's how-to-make-a-film lecture influences all his pupils in their shooting and editing style, but it's also true that his mode of storytelling – self-deprecating but proud of real achievements, delighting in his own reputation for penny-pinching, thoughtful yet to the point – is taken

up by most of his collaborators in talking about their time with him. Other accounts have stressed some of the more difficult creative relationships Corman has had – with his early backers Samuel Arkoff and James Nicholson at American International, and with collaborators who felt short-changed or abandoned by the rapid development of his career – but this downplays those elements. Not all of Corman's B movies are as much fun as they ought to be, especially in his cable TV phase, but an amazing number of them are far stronger than they needed to be and many of the films he directed hold up far better than the supposed A pictures that were more highly praised and awarded at the time. The anecdotes are great and always welcome but they should ultimately lead back to the movies. ☺



Dream factory: Roger Corman

## A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A POLITICAL DISSIDENT

THE LIFE AND WORK OF  
ALEKSANDAR PETROVIC

By Vlastimir Sudar. Intellect Books. 366pp. £45.  
ISBN 9781841505459

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

In 1961, director Aleksandar Petrović (1929-94) made his solo fiction debut, *Dvoje (And Love Has Vanished)*. Well within a decade, he'd become a Cannes-garlanded and Oscar-nominated standard-bearer for Yugoslavia and a leading light in the country's own 'Black Wave', with only Dušan Makavejev rivalling him for English-language column inches. Petrović also pioneered what would become an Eastern European film genre in its own right: quasi-ethnographic, vaguely magical-realist dramas built around unusually sympathetic portraits of Roma communities. Anyone who thinks that Emir Kusturica and Tony Gatlif broke new ground has clearly never seen *I Even Met Happy Gypsies* (1967) and *It Rains in My Village* (1968). And yet Petrović is almost entirely forgotten today.

One of the aims of Vlastimir Sudar's fascinating but sobering book is to explain how this neglect came about – a desperately unfortunate chain of circumstances including official disfavour and

the dissolution of his native country, its violent break-up coinciding with his death on a Paris operating table in 1994, months after the belated premiere of his last film *Migrations* (the disastrous saga of its production and release, Sudar asserts, "would form a tragic novel in itself").

Throughout, Sudar stresses that for all Petrović's apparent internationalism (his later films were co-productions, and his stars included Brad Dourif, Annie Girardot, Isabelle Huppert, Romy Schneider and Ugo Tognazzi), he was primarily a Yugoslav. Refreshingly, Sudar refuses to adopt the usual auteurist approach, arguing that instead of being the archetypal "lone genius", Petrović was very much a product of his temporal, geographical and cultural environment, appreciation of which is both crucial towards both understanding his work and explaining its subsequent near-disappearance.

Accordingly, the book doubles as a detailed history of Yugoslav cinema and the complex, ever-shifting relationship between its artists and masters – not least Tito, a voracious film buff whose personal approval or disdain could change entire careers. Those relying on illicit online viewings of subtitled TV rips (presently the easiest way of seeing much of Petrović's work) will be grateful for the level of narrative detail provided alongside the expected analyses. Sudar also devotes much space to the films' reception, revealing how Petrović's compatriots responded to what was often overt social criticism, his regular themes being inter-



Aleksandar Petrović's *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*

ethnic relationships, religion, class differences and blind adherence to socialist dogma.

The return of the latter tendency to the Yugoslav film industry led to Petrović's near-permanent exile, spending years shuttling between Paris and Budapest while meeting a sharp rise in living costs (a severely disabled son posed particular challenges) by pseudonymously scripting such films as *Emmanuelle 2* – an experience that itself illustrates the cultural divide between Eastern and Western Europe and the latter's very different pressures. Petrović would only direct two more films, over a decade apart.

The wealth of detail makes the book gripping even in the absence of many of the films, although if Sudar's dogged advocacy (also expressed in the pages of *S&S*) helps spur an adventurous DVD label into reviving them, so much the better. Ⓢ

## STOLEN GLIMPSES CAPTIVE SHADOWS: WRITING ON FILM 2002-2012

By Geoffrey O'Brien. Counterpoint, 322pp, \$25.  
ISBN 9781619021709

### Reviewed by Nick James

Geoffrey O'Brien is a Brooklynite cultural polymath whose practices include poetry and cultural archaeologies of quality. I'm familiar with two of his books of the latter kind – *The Phantom Empire: Movies in the Mind of the 20th Century*, his innovative 1993 mapping of the effects of cinema on our imagination, and *Hardboiled America: Lurid Paperbacks and the Masters of Noir*, his excellent 1997 study of pulp fiction that's almost as interested in the cover art as it is in the stories. He's also the editor-in-chief of the Library of America so it's no shock when looking at this new collection of film appreciations – written mostly for the *New York Review of Books*, *Film Comment* and for Criterion DVD booklets – that a literary kind of erudition abounds. Yet it's whenever high cinematic ambition is achieved from pulpish sources that O'Brien's prose sings the most, such as when Kurosawa uses Ed McBain's *King's Ransom* – "not even one of the better novels of his '87th Precinct' series" – as the basis for *High and Low*, "one of his [Kurosawa's] most expansive and symphonic works, a film that immerses itself in the minutiae of the modern metropolis".

In his introduction, O'Brien warns that "movies are the banal miracle, an achieved magic to which we have become almost inured". He is particularly fascinated by the way cinema's

capture of the past affects us so that "those filmed gestures and locations seem almost part of the body, an internalised heraldic history of the life of feeling". None of this brooding on how we've been changed by movies, however, gets in the way of his lively absorption in the textural intricacy and visual panache of cinema. There's little of the near-automatic disdain you so often get when one of the UK literary gang deigns to dash off her/his impressions of big-screen experiences.

The films that inspire the nine Criterion pieces included show a solid breadth of taste from Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (1946) through to Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), though none of

*None of his brooding on how  
we've been changed by movies  
gets in the way of his absorption  
in the visual panache of cinema*



Akira Kurosawa's *High and Low*

them is more recent than Okamoto's *The Sword of Doom* (1966). But then these shorter items sit in nice contrast to the *NYRB* essays that are – with the exception of succinct tributes to Gary Grant and Val Lewton – dedicated to significant recent works, as are the *Film Comment* articles about *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003) and *The Passion of the Christ* (2004).

This last review and one on *Minority Report* (2002) attracted me, frankly, because I had written about both at similar length. O'Brien's take on the Mel Gibson passion play is a model of dispassionate appraisal. "The shock effect of *The Passion of the Christ* is its resort, in order to convey a sacred event that is by definition unfilmable, not to transcendent beauty but to a vocabulary of violence most often associated with the basest of horror movies. (But, of course, of all genres it is in horror movies that buried religious ideas most abound)." The way that sentence in parentheses qualifies its predecessor, like juxtaposing two colours to make a third, is the mark of a highly skilled rhetorician.

On the other hand, Spielberg's *Minority Report* makes O'Brien seem as if he's checking to see if the smelling salts are within reach – "this ought to be indigestible but it's exuberantly sustained" – or whether a Spielberg film can offer an opportunity for grand statements: "The beauty of the form is precisely that it permits the contemplation of the direst possibilities under conditions of optimum lightheadedness." If that last polysyllabic utterance seems rather Latinate for a fan of pulp, rest assured it is uncharacteristic. For most of the time, O'Brien wears his erudition lightly and deals out words in leaner fashion.

At a time when any collection of critical writings on film might seem moot, *stolen glimpses captive shadows* stands out in relief, as much through the distinction of O'Brien's learnedness as through its sharp perceptions. Ⓢ



## A WONDERFUL HEART

THE FILMS OF WILLIAM WYLER

By Neil Sinyard, McFarland & Company, 248pp, \$49.95. ISBN 9780786435739

## WILLIAM WYLER

THE LIFE AND FILMS OF HOLLYWOOD'S MOST CELEBRATED DIRECTOR

By Gabriel Miller, University Press of Kentucky, 483pp, \$39.95. ISBN 9780813142098

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In January 1960, the UK magazine *Films & Filming* voted William Wyler's widescreen Western *The Big Country* (1958) the Best Film from Any Source "for the combination of a profound theme in a popular entertainment format and its high standard of technique". Yet in an article on Wyler in the magazine's very next issue a month later, John Howard Reid deplored "the heavy-handedness of *Roman Holiday*, the sure-fire commonplaces of *The Desperate Hours*, the notable unevenness of *Friendly Persuasion* and the trite heroics of *The Big Country*... These last four films reveal a steadily increasing desire to pander to box-office foibles".

Just after the war, following the release of the Oscar-garlanded *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), Wyler's reputation, both in the USA and abroad, could scarcely have stood higher. "Wyler," wrote James Agee, "has always seemed to me an exceedingly sincere and good director; now he seems one of the great ones." In France, Roger Leenhardt famously headlined an article in *L'écran français* "A bas Ford, vive Wyler!" and in a hugely influential piece in *Revue du cinéma* André Bazin praised Wyler's "style sans style", observing that the director "has taken economy of means to the point where it becomes, paradoxically, one of the most personal styles in today's cinema... His great talent lies in achieving clarity through the stripping down of the formal elements – placing himself at the service both of his subject-matter and of his audience."

But during the last 20 years of Wyler's life (he died in 1981) it was Reid's view that came to prevail – not just in regard to his late films but to his entire output. As cinematic fashions changed, Wyler found himself damned for those very qualities for which he was once praised. His restraint came to be seen as frigidity, good taste as complacency, seriousness as pomposity, technical accomplishment and clarity as blandness. Laying down the auteurist line in *The American Cinema*, Andrew Sarris dismissed him as "a cipher as far as personal direction is concerned... Wyler's admirers have long mistaken a lack of feeling for emotional restraint". David Thomson abetted the assault: "Wyler has no cinematic personality, no abiding thematic interests and no proper grasp of camera language."

As might be deduced from his slightly Mills & Boon-ish title, Neil Sinyard sets out to counter such judgements. Long a champion of Wyler's work, he subjects each of the director's films (barring the silent Western shorts and a few of the early features) to lucid, detailed analysis, building the case for him as "one of the great dramatic craftsmen" and identifying his strengths as "the unobtrusive visual craftsmanship, the excellence




Style sans style: William Wyler

of performance, the subtlety and solidity of his dramatic structures, and his unerring control of tempo and tension". More than this, he aims to rebut the charge of any "lack of feeling", citing movies such as *Dodsworth* (1936), *Jezebel* (1938), *The Little Foxes* (1941) and *Carrie* (1952) as "films that can wring the heart", and noting how Wyler's "observations of compassion, goodness and love... contend with his unflinching dramatizations of greed, prejudice and hypocrisy".

Occasionally Sinyard's advocacy pushes him into overclaiming: is the rarely seen *Counsellor at Law* (1933) really "regarded as one of the best films ever made about the legal profession"? But he puts forward strong arguments for the reassessment of lesser-rated films such as *Detective Story* (1951), *Carrie* and *The Children's Hour* (1961) and, while conceding their weaknesses, makes the best possible case for Wyler's final movies, in particular *The Collector* (1965) and *The Liberation of L.B. Jones* (1970). Sinyard rates *Liberation*, a film way overdue for revival, as "one of the bravest indictments of racial hatred ever to come out of a Hollywood studio", noting that it finds Wyler "still unafraid to venture into new cinematic territory".

Gabriel Miller similarly takes issue with Sarris and Thomson's verdicts. Wyler, he suggests, wasn't only a "master at exploring repressed

emotions" but displayed "a remarkable thematic consistency. Much of his work mounts a quarrel with and an investigation of his adopted country", reflecting "a strong social and political vision". He covers much the same chronological ground as Sinyard, concentrating on the films and analysing Wyler's expressive use of "spatial structures that encapsulate a scene's meaning". Despite the book's subtitle, the director's life receives relatively limited treatment, though there's a fuller account of his wartime experiences. More space is given here to Wyler's source material (the great majority of his films were adapted from plays or novels), sometimes rather too much: we get a lengthy examination of Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth* as novel and play before Wyler even enters the picture.

Though Wyler was staunchly liberal throughout his life – he fiercely opposed the post-war anti-communist witch-hunt, and at one point publicly threatened to punch Cecil B. DeMille on the nose – Miller suggests that "the failure of liberalism... was Wyler's own political philosophy". Both he and Sinyard note an underlying pessimism that informs most of the films; uncomplicatedly happy outcomes are in short supply. (Neither, however, detects the cryptic reference in the title of 1953's *Roman Holiday* that points up the bittersweet ultimate sacrifice of the princess's youthful vivacity on the altar of state protocol. I refer to Byron's line: "Butchered to make a Roman holiday".) Altogether, both writers make a considered, cogent and for the most part convincing case for the rehabilitation of a major filmmaker whose achievement, for the last 40 years, has been seriously undervalued. 

*As fashions changed, his restraint came to be seen as frigidity, good taste as complacency and seriousness as pomposity*



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## ORDINARY MIRACLES

Discussing the Criterion DVD release of 3 films by Roberto Rossellini starring Ingrid Bergman ('From Plaster Saint to Pilgrim', S&S, December), Nick Pinkerton shows his understanding of the spiritual quality of these films in his comment that "Bergman's character has a revelation that is tinged with the divine". His point that Ingrid Bergman on screen exuded a certain sanctity is well made. And he is most assuredly right about the unexpected but deeply fulfilling ending of *Journey to Italy*.

By contrast, in the 'Endings' feature on *Journey to Italy* (S&S, July), Brad Stevens sees this ending in terms of Rossellini's egalitarianism. This is surely wrong. We see Alex and Katherine Joyce, separated from their automobile and initially from each other and on foot, and abruptly exposed to a dense crowd of pedestrians including a man apparently healed of his lameness and (possibly) blindness, and a group of bandsmen. The fact that all this physical propinquity does not reveal any very obvious interrelation, and that the causes of Alex's and Katherine's sudden reconciliation remain unclear, may be taken to signal a larger than human perspective. The operation of a shaping divinity is suggested, but not fully demonstrated.

It is just this sense of the miraculous which seems to elude the director Richard Linklater when ('Passing Through', S&S, July 2013) he talks about the reference to Rossellini's film in *Before Midnight*: "You believe it [the ending]? I don't believe it. Knowing Rossellini and Bergman were over by then..."

It may be useful to compare *Voyage to Italy* with Antonioni's *La notte*, made six years later, also discussed as a DVD in the December 2013 S&S, and, clearly, influenced by Rossellini's film. Like *Voyage to Italy*, *La notte* is the study of a disintegrating marriage; but Antonioni seems more exclusively preoccupied with the unobserved physical world as a backdrop to his dramas than by the seemingly random manifestations of human social intercourse (even the volcanic, Vesuvian, Pompeian scenes in *Journey to Italy* are given a human relevance). Antonioni's objective, 'scientific' detachment from the physical phenomena that he observes is effective in setting the scene – as a kind of objective correlative – for total marital breakdown; whereas Rossellini's artist's ability to reach out into other lives, with all their confusions and ramifications, contains a greater promise of human and spiritual retrieval. Or should I say redemption? Anyway, and to quote John Berryman: "Do not imagine this is unimportant."

John Owston Southall

## DON'T MENTION THE WAR

I was delighted to see the re-release of *Gone with the Wind*, a film too often written off despite Vivien Leigh's incredible performance, its creative use of colour, its effective translation of a huge

## LETTER OF THE MONTH SMALL TALK, BIG PICTURE



Whilst I agree for the most part with Jonathan Romney's somewhat dour review of *Gravity* (S&S, December), he misses the psychological and existential significance of the dialogue. Yes, the patter is clunky, trope-ridden, and needlessly chirpy, but it also acts as a source of sustenance to characters faced with overwhelming isolation. Clooney's patter, for all its inanity, is a coping mechanism – it is significant that it is taken up by Bullock's character, along with some of Clooney's exact phrasing ("I have a bad feeling about this"), at the point

where she makes a renewed attempt to survive. It is also important that she makes this choice after accidentally stumbling into conversation with a distant human presence on her radio. Perhaps the sound of the baby is a step too far, but the fundamental point is initially made poetically, through the subjective effect of interpersonal contact. So whilst it seems at first to ground the film in canonic Hollywood sentimentality, *Gravity*'s dialogue has a more complicated function than Romney gives it credit for.

John Tait Sheffield

novel to the screen, its "rumblings of a feminist manifesto" (Molly Haskell) and even its deliberate effort to see "that the Negroes come out decidedly on the right side of the ledger" (David O. Selznick).

I was less pleased to see it in 'Five key American Civil War films' (S&S, November), which distorts the movie's focus. Selznick recognised *GWTW* could become a Civil War story, but he wanted something different. War and reconstruction were not the subjects of the narrative, but only its setting. The film concentrates instead on interlocking lives, on endurance and survival in the face of social upheaval. In many ways *GWTW* is closer to *Germany Year Zero* than to *Gettysburg*. Even Scarlett had it right: "Fiddle-dee-dee! War, war, war."

Ray Lahey Canada

## FAMILY FAVOURITE

It was nice to read Nick Bradshaw's interview with James Benning (S&S, October). The first part of *Ruhr*, the tunnel sequence, is an all-time favourite of mine. Not only does it rack up the tension in such a simple and unique way, it also contains one of the most unexpected and unusually funny moments in film, at least on first viewing. Every now and then, I sit with my children (aged five and seven) and await with bated breath the moment we know is coming yet gets us every time.

We have sat through the other sequences from *Ruhr* and the pair of them greatly

enjoy experiencing both the stillness and repetitions, rapt in concentration, spotting tiny nuances on each viewing.

It is reassuring to know there are films out there that are the antithesis of the brash entertainment that seems to bombard us these days, films that can be enjoyed by children and adults alike.

Andrew Ledwidge London

## BLURRED IN THE WATER

I'm afraid I cannot join in the praise for the film *Leviathan*. Having expected a documentary on life on a fishing boat, I was subjected to fuzzy camerawork, pointless, repetitious shots underwater and little clear evidence of how the crew lived and worked. The final straw came with a shot of the sea and seagulls above projected upside down. Such a disappointment, as I had admired *Sweetgrass*, a previous feature by one of *Leviathan*'s directors.

Michael Bailey Edinburgh

## Additions and corrections

**December** p.69 *Breakfast with Johnny* Wilkinson, Certificate 15, 95m 11s, 8,566 ft +8 frames; p.70 *Computer Chess*, Certificate 15, 91m 26s, 8,229 ft +0 frames; p.72 *Don Hemingway*, Certificate 15, 93m 51s, 8,446 ft +8 frames; p.76 *Future My Love*, Certificate 12A, 96m 59s, 8,728 ft +8 frames; p.78 *How to Survive a Plague*, Certificate 15, 109m 41s, 9,871 ft +8 frames; p.84 *Pandora's Promise*, Certificate 12A, 86m 31s, 7,786 ft +8 frames  
**November** p.35 *The Tragic Mountain*: images from the film and the portrait of John Noel should have been credited: © John Noel Photographic Collection; p.73 *Cutie and the Boxer*, Certificate 12A, 82m 11s

# THE INNOCENTS



Jack Clayton's version of *The Turn of the Screw* has all the bleakness and ambiguity of the original – in spite of the studio

**By Christopher Frayling**

On 20 January 1961, just before location filming on *The Innocents* was scheduled to begin at Sheffield Park, Sussex, vice-president of Twentieth Century-Fox Joe Moskowitz cabled director Jack Clayton about the script's ending. He was very concerned. The governess Miss Giddens (Deborah Kerr) is cradling the limp body of ten-year-old Miles (Martin Stephens). She is distraught as she realises that the boy's heart has stopped beating. Then she leans forward, closes her eyes, and kisses him fully, in a very grown-up way, on the lips. In the original script, the one seen by Moskowitz, she carries Miles's body back to Bly House, from the garden, up the steps to the terrace, and sees: "From the top of the house the pigeons fly as if in a white cloud. She moves towards the dark doorway (carrying the lifeless body) as we FADE OUT".

Moskowitz did not like this "ambiguous ending" at all. Whatever Henry James may have written in the novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), he thought there should be a happier finale. In particular, there should be "more positive results offered in this relationship between Miss Giddens and [her urbane employer] the Uncle than the present bleak ending". The Uncle should in some way be seen to acknowledge "his own responsibility for what happens at the end". After all, he employed the inexperienced governess, left her in charge of a large, remote, establishment, and flirted with her at the job interview.

In mid-October 1961, following early studio screenings of the finished film, the head of Fox Spyros Skouras reiterated these concerns. The

ending had been slightly changed during filming. Instead of the white pigeons – a rather obvious symbol of a soul in flight, and a Hollywood closure of sorts – there was now, after that kiss, an inky black screen, Deborah Kerr leaning backwards with Miles in her lap, the sound of a nightingale and "very slowly the hands of Miss Giddens entering the frame from below, pressed together as though in prayer". This ending was intended as an "almost exact duplicate" of the film's opening, which had been written by Truman Capote at the last minute. Jack Clayton was to recall: "(Skouras) called me from Hollywood... He said 'you can't finish a film like that.' I asked him why and he spluttered 'because – because – it's not done.' Every two days for a solid two weeks, he called begging me to change the ending, which I would not do and did not do."

For Jack Clayton, from the very beginning, the ambiguity of Henry James's novella had been the main attraction. He called it "the most perfect example of real horror" precisely because so much was left to the reader's imagination – "the opposite of overstated, over clear horror scenes" such as Hammer had been producing for the past three years, which in the end were unsatisfying. A copy of Edmund Wilson's influential Freudian essay of 1934 on 'The Ambiguity of Henry James', which argued that the predatory ghosts of the valet Peter Quint and the previous governess Miss Jessel might be figments of the central character's overheated imagination, was attached in Clayton's production notes to the first draft screenplay. In his earliest advice to William Archibald, author of a successful

*'Every two days for a solid two weeks, Fox called begging me to change the ending, which I would not do and did not do'*

stage version of *The Turn of the Screw* called *The Innocents* (1950), on which the film was to be notionally based, Clayton emphasised that the screen version should combine, as subtly as possible, "the governess's point of view" with "that old horror" – without the horror "no public's going to see it". Yes, there would be the strong suggestion from the word go that this story was about "a woman's passion", carried away by the beauty of the children in her care and infatuated with the bachelor Uncle (eventually Michael Redgrave): there would also be palpable ghosts, in daylight and at night, for the audience to see and be scared by. But there had to be a better way of communicating this ambiguity than the play's ending, with offstage shrieking, billowing silk curtains, and Miss Giddens kneeling by Miles's body sobbing "You are free!" Clayton proposed an intimate moment after the final horror of Peter Quint's snarling appearance on a plinth in the garden, and after the audience had registered that Miss Giddens was dressed in mourning black, like the ghost of her predecessor Miss Jessel: "If we are to use the idea of the boy in one scene quite near the end kissing her on the lips – literally kissing her as a grown-up man would kiss her... I think we might very easily have the boy die in her arms... but then at the very end she carries him back to the house and up the steps and then she repeats the boy's kiss. She kisses his cold, beautiful dead little face, she kisses it fully, completely, on the lips as one would with one's lover."

Archibald followed Clayton's advice to the letter, Truman Capote later refined it, and the result was a distillation of the ambiguity of Henry James into a single, disturbing visual image. Fox continued to dislike it. **S**

**i** Christopher Frayling is the author of the new BFI Film Classic on *The Innocents*. The film is re-released in the UK on 13 December as part of the BFI's 'Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film' project



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